

INTRODUCTION

Manfredo Settala (1600–1680), Milan, was one of the great collectors of 17th century Europe. He had inherited the Cabinet from his father and continued the work of collecting with growing passion. His Cabinet included objects of every kind: minerals, stuffed animals, horns and skeletons, automata, pressed plants, clocks and weapons etc. The collection became widely known and a growing number of visitors came to see it at Via Pantano.

A catalogue, published in seven volumes, was organised thematically and presented an exact picture of his way of organising knowledge about the universe. Settala commissioned artists to draw and paint pictures of the highlights of the collection. When published in the catalogue, the illustrations enforced the meaning of each object as if creating a scientific aura for them.

A fine line drawing demonstrates how every inch of the four rooms at his residence, including the ceiling, were used to display the collection. In contemporary terms, we would probably talk about an installation: something that cannot be torn down in pieces since every item has its specific place and purpose in the collection.

Patrick Mauries explains in his book *Cabinet of Curiosities* (2002) that even Settala's funeral celebrated his life as a collector. When he died in 1680, his coffin was followed by a convoy carrying the most curious items from his collection.

The history of collecting is full of stories such as this one: they tell us about dedication and endless curiosity, a need to know more about the world around us. Private collections that are compiled with vision and passion often become part of other collections. Museum history would not be the same without the individual donators who sought to contribute to the building of national or regional collections. In the same way, it would not be the same if public bodies had not wanted to save the lifetime achievements of collectors by purchasing whole collections. This was also the case with Settala, whose collection was later acquired by Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

Contemporary collectors, both private and public, continue the saga by joining the line of collectors. The number of items in various collections all over Europe is constantly growing. Unlike during the earlier periods, all items are not necessarily being displayed or researched properly. Store collections grow and the objects turn into endless lists of inventory numbers and digital thumbnail photos. Museums might even be competing with each other for the same pieces or purchasing collections that mirror each other.

One of the key questions here is should we stop hoarding and start concentrating on the better use of the already existing collections? Should museums have easier access to those parts of each others' collections that are being underused? Should museums start thinking differently? Digital platforms can easily help museums to create ways to look for and find objects that the collection is desperately lacking. It is simply a matter of wanting to open those doors.

This book offers some starting points for working together and sharing collections. It provides information about the history of collecting and suggests different ways to approach the collections and collecting related activities. It proposes that museums should rather be encouraged to build collection strategies of the 21st century than repeating the old pattern that is based on the idea of eternal growth.

The book also looks into the value building process of museum objects and discusses some principles that determine the economic value of art and antiquities. It analyses the use of collections and suggests using them actively for the enjoyment of all who wish to have access to our cultural heritage. It explores the ways in which conservation and the care of objects affect the mobility of museum objects, and discusses, how the collections and their displays answer the needs of the contemporary visitor.

Whereas most of the articles provide a philosophical context for the collections and their use, the book also addresses the practical issues concerning collections mobility. The core questions were indicated at the European Union level during a long process and a great deal of work has already been carried out in order to make things easier for museums. Specific collections mobility issues, as discussed in the European Union Open Method and Co-ordination Expert Group on Mobility of Collections 2008–2010, have also been addressed in this book. These issues include immunity from seizure, insurances, non-insurances and state indemnities, long-term loans, loan fees, and digitisation. It is also pointed out that standards, trust, and good networking form the basis for all co-operation. The last chapter in the book provides a practical guide to the Collections Mobility process: it pulls together current good practice in developing loans procedures and sets it out in a clear format.

As the title of the book indicates, mobility of collections is a relevant way forward for museums in Europe and worldwide. This book is written for collection activists, students, and museum professionals who are determined to explore and research collections in order to open our rich collection resources and learn more about European heritage. Collections exist in order to be celebrated and shared.

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