

Press information
Linz, May 19, 2015

MARK DION / US
WUNDERKAMMER Oberösterreich
at HÖHENRAUSCH 2015

The OÖ Kulturquartier sees itself as an experimental platform for regional culture and strives to develop programs that deal in an innovative, original and unusual way with the region of Upper Austria.

The concept of a Wunderkammer, or “cabinet of curiosities,” that is constantly evolving and renewing itself is an important part of this vision of the Upper Austrian Culture Quarter. It is now being implemented for the first time at Höhenrausch 2015.

Cabinets of curiosities were the historical precursors of museums. They were places to marvel and wonder at motley assortments of things and objects with wide-ranging origins. In these germ cells of scientific study, the boundaries between the natural and the artificial were still fuzzy, and strict scientific ordering and classification in the modern sense were just beginning. The class of a certain object and its material “value” were not as important as its originality and (exotic) origin.

The idea of assembling such mixed groups of objects is still of interest today, especially from an artistic point of view. The curiosity cabinet principle enables us, for example, to take a very unorthodox look at a region or a cultural theme, making it possible to move beyond museum categories and also take into consideration everyday objects (for this year’s Festival der Regionen, for instance, a “Wunderkammer Ebensee” is being set up at the Solvay Villa by a Spanish artist and a curator).

On the whole, a “Wunderkammer of Upper Austria” offers an ideal complement to the museum collections.

The acclaimed US artist Mark Dion, a true master of collecting and archiving, has agreed to produce the first major Wunderkammer exhibition for Upper Austria, in the context of Höhenrausch 2015.

Dion has been a passionate collector for more than twenty years. In his installations, which often recall natural science exhibits, he likes to investigate the tensions between nature, humanity and science, ironically challenging scientific museum classifications and our attempts to grasp the complexity of nature. In his opinion, the taxonomic systems with which we try to make natural processes comprehensible say more about our social and political ideologies than about nature itself. His real concern is therefore not so much scientific as ecological and political.

To fit in with the theme of Höhenrausch 2015, Mark Dion is installing a fantastical "Air World": along with a walk-in aviary with zebra finches, he has assembled some 350 objects from Upper Austrian museums, private collections, antique shops, flea markets and second-hand shops.

65% of the museum objects come from the Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseen (Upper Austrian Regional Museums), an important Höhenrausch cooperation partner. The Kremsmünster Abbey has provided its own original curiosity cabinets (built in 1780) for the exhibit.

MARK DION

Air World, 2015

Mark Dion creates artworks dealing with the organizational systems behind the human penchant for collecting, fascinated by the magical collections that were later replaced with the more scientific approach taken by the museum. He draws on scientific and archeological methods and processes for the realization of his projects: collecting, archiving, classifying and comparing, but also ensuring a direct experience of the objects he presents. The unusual compilation of artefacts and specimens attests to the centuries-old human fascination with flying and how it has lent wings to our spirit of invention.

The objects are diverse, taken from areas such as archeology, military and technological applications, folklore, fine and applied arts, biology, and numismatics, but also from graphic art collections, schools, and libraries. Among the highlights are a celestial globe created by the

prominent astronomer Johann Gabriel Doppelmayr in 1790, from the Abbey of St. Florian, an iron meteorite from Portugal from the OÖ Landesmuseen, and a horizontal sundial produced by Franz Ressler (1759) from the **Hohenfurth/ Vyssi** Brod Monastery.

Lenders: OÖ Landesmuseen, Lentos and Nordico, Ars Electronica Center, OÖ Kunstsammlung/ Artothek, Linz Airport, BRG Fadingerstraße, Helikopter Air Transport GMHB, Fa. HB Flugtechnik Haid, Movimiento /City Kino, Fritz Lüftinger (bird carver), Kunstsammlungen Stift Kremsmünster, Sternwarte Stift Kremsmünster, Stadtmuseum Peuerbach, Kloster Vyssi Brod, Stift St. Florian.

Library for the Birds of Linz, 2015

[Bibliothek für die Vögel von Linz]

In an aviary, Mark Dion has set up not only a library for birds, but also a walk-in installation focusing on the relationship between human and animal. The birds and the visitors are urged here to acquire knowledge needed to meet the challenges of their shared lives.

In his decades-long artistic engagement, Dion has always taken a critical approach to how we deal with nature. Driven by a thirst for knowledge and a spirit of discovery, people love to explore, measure and collect natural phenomena. At the same time, however, we exploit animals and our common habitat for our own ends. In addition to ornithological and natural history books, Dion has made available to the 20 or so zebra finches and Java sparrows in an oversized circular aviary a library of “useful” information (such as travel guides and literature about cats and the pollution of the oceans). Literature tips are joined here by tongue-in-cheek warnings about the sometimes “dangerous” equipment deployed by humans, such as weapons and traps. Dion thus ironically suggests a shift in perspective, which becomes all the more evident when the visitor enters the “Bird World” of the aviary and himself becomes an exhibit.

The Realm of the Air, 2015

[Das Reich der Lüfte]

Silhouettes bathed in black light, which stand out as vague outlines against the dark surface of the walls, give visitors an idea of the abundance and diversity of existing (or imaginary) “flying bodies.”

Real, natural, historical, mythical and technological flying creatures and objects are gathered here side by side in life size. This densely populated *Realm of the Air* spans all conceivable categories: from animals ranging from the small Asian hornet to the giant pterodactyl, to imaginary angels, to various flying objects such as arrow and balloon, all the way to aircraft like those designed by Leonardo da Vinci.

Participation project “All That Flies,” 2015

In the Mark Dion project *All That Flies*, objects loaned by private persons are showcased in display cases to create a “cabinet of curiosities for exhibition visitors.”

Objects or illustrations that have something to do with “flying” can be found in many households, saved by their owners for multiple reasons. Items like these will be collected during Höhenrausch and exhibited complete with a fact sheet – provided that they fit in a shoe box.

Visitors to Höhenrausch are thus called upon to bring their “flying objects” with them to the show and to lend them to the *Wunderkammer*. The items (or pictures) can come from nature, represent flying machines, or have some other connection with flying (stuffed birds, special feathers, butterflies, aircraft models of all kinds, as well as sports equipment such as frisbees, arrows, shuttlecocks, etc.). What will make this collection of diverse objects interesting are the respective stories behind the exhibits: Why have these things been preserved as keepsakes? Where are they kept and what is their importance to their owners?

Mark Dion

b. 1961 in New Bedford, Massachusetts, US. Lives and works in New York City, US.

Dion worked as an art conservator until 1982. In 1984 he began studies at the School of Visual Arts in New York and participated in 1985 in the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art, likewise in New York, where he met the conceptual artists Joseph Kosuth and Hans Haacke and the photographer Martha Rosler. In 1986 he switched to the University of Hartford School of Art in Hartford, Connecticut. From 1986 to 1990 he was studio assistant to Ashley Bickerton.