

**Exhibition:** *The World Made Wondrous: The Dutch Collector's Cabinet and the Politics of Possession*

**Dates:** September 17, 2023–March 3, 2024

**Location:** Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 5)

(Los Angeles, CA—June 22, 2023) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *The World Made Wondrous: The Dutch Collector's Cabinet and the Politics of Possession*, an immersive exploration of the economic and political structures that laid the groundwork for today's museums. Assembling an imagined 17th-century Dutch collector's cabinet, the exhibition brings together over 300 artworks, animal and mineral specimens, scientific instruments, books, and maps, with a rich landscape of multivocal narratives by experts ranging from environmental historians and zoologists to contemporary artists and Indigenous activists.

Across Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, wealthy people established collector's cabinets, vast collections that they claimed contained art and natural specimens representing the entirety of the known world. As Europeans amassed these collections, they ordered the world in deliberate ways, asserting judgments and hierarchies on the value of natural materials, craftsmanship, and human worth. In many ways, these cabinets acted as prototypes for—and in some cases direct predecessors of—modern encyclopedic museums, including LACMA. Using the 17th-century Dutch example as a starting point, *The World Made Wondrous* unpacks the mercantile and colonial contexts that facilitated these foundational collections. While previous studies of collector's cabinets have centered the narrative of the owner, this exhibition investigates the journey of the objects and the stories of those who produced them. The exhibition is curated by Diva Zumaya, Assistant Curator, European Painting and Sculpture, at LACMA.

“In engaging these objects through an expansive historical lens, we hope to shine a light on how the interconnected legacies of capitalism and colonialism that began in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries continue to this day and how the human and environmental devastation that they enact affect not only museums and the collections they care for, but the entire world,” said Zumaya. “By uncovering and critically examining these legacies, museums can find new pathways forward that allow us to serve our communities while building futures together outside of colonial frameworks.”

“This exhibition reveals how new connections and critical histories arise from deep collaboration across our departments,” said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “While many museums have global collections, LACMA is one of the few taking such an approach. This allows us to meaningfully reconsider the topic of the collector’s cabinet and the relationships between collecting, global trade, and the environment in contemporary Los Angeles.”

Staged with dynamic lighting, warm colors, and other design elements that transport the visitor to a 17th-century collector’s cabinet, *The World Made Wondrous* examines over 170 works from LACMA’s permanent collection, including examples from Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Japan, Peru, Turkey, and Sri Lanka, and never-before-shown objects such as Francesco da Castello’s miniature *Salvator Mundi* (c. 1580–90), a large 16th-century Belgian tapestry, a recently acquired Rembrandt etching, and two Chinese cups from the late Ming dynasty, carved from rhinoceros horn.

Marking one of the largest collaborations between LACMA and the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles to date, the exhibition also draws 80 gems and minerals, shells, taxidermy, and other objects from the Natural History Museum, as well as rare books and maps from the Getty Research Institute, the UCLA Biomedical Library, and the Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, and scientific instruments from Chicago’s Adler Planetarium. In addition to these historical objects and natural specimens, works by four contemporary artists—Jennifer Ling Datchuk, Todd Gray, Sithabile Mlotshwa, and Uýra Sodoma—act as cornerstones for the exhibition. These contemporary works offer significant political and personal reflections on the histories that unfold in the exhibition.

### **Exhibition Guide**

*The World Made Wondrous* features an interactive Exhibition Guide that creates an immersive journey through the exhibition. Accessible as audio via personal mobile devices and in-gallery printed handouts, visitors can engage with a series of commentaries accompanying select objects. These narratives are voiced by a wide range of speakers, including contemporary artists, scientists, Indigenous activists, and environmental historians. Through this diverse breadth of expertise, the Exhibition

Guide encourages visitors to question dominant historical perspectives and consider the broader contexts surrounding the objects on view.

### **Exhibition Organization**

*The World Made Wondrous* is organized into four sections—The Collector, Water, Earth, and Fire.

In the exhibition's first section, **The Collector**, visitors are introduced to the figure of the Dutch collector and how his cabinet has been assembled to reflect his character and position. This section features heraldic imagery, portraits of historical figures to whom the collector seeks to liken himself—such as Rembrandt's *Portrait of Dirck Jansz. Pesser* (c. 1634) and *Portrait of Marten Looten* (1632)—religious images signifying his faith, and objects that represent his access to leisure. The section provides a social and political foundation for the ways the collector has constructed the world through his collection, with the Dutch Republic at its center.

**Water** explores narratives around the ocean, materials extracted from it, and images of Dutch maritime power. When encountering a Japanese lacquer chest, visitors can listen to Japanese artist Shinya Yamamura discuss the particularities of working with lacquer, and a malacologist explain the function of mother of pearl as a part of a living organism. Responding to specimens from the Natural History Museum, LA-based artist Todd Gray reflects on the role of the cowrie shell in the slave trade, while a labor and migration historian discusses the process of shipping such specimens on Dutch East India Company ships.

**Earth** engages the natural world through a series of landscape and still life paintings, land-based natural specimens, and objects that incorporate materials like ebony, ivory, and feathers. Here, visitors are prompted to compare Frans Post's *Imagined Landscape of Dutch Brazil* (c. 1655) with a work by Indigenous Brazilian artist Uýra Sodoma that addresses the contemporary deforestation of the Amazon rainforest. In the audio guide, visitors can engage with the artist's account of the far-reaching effects of settler colonialism on her land, a sociologist's discussion of deforestation in the Amazon, and an art historian's discussion of Post's motives. The visitor is also invited to consider Abraham van Beyerens's painting *Banquet Still Life* (1667) in concert with artist Sithabile Mlotshwa's response to its representation of Dutch wealth. Other narratives in this section address the practice of European natural history, Indigenous Brazilian foodways, and rhinoceros conservation.

The final section, **Fire**, spotlights earthenware, metals, minerals, porcelain, and gems. While viewing a Chinese porcelain bowl from the late Ming dynasty, visitors can listen to American artist Jennifer Ling Datchuk discuss her relationship with the fraught history of this material and its role in her own works *Ache Like a Girl* (2021) and

*Break Like a Woman* (2021), which are featured in the gallery. As they engage with a selection of gems and minerals from the Natural History Museum and a Mughal gem-inlaid dagger hilt from LACMA's collection, visitors can hear experts discuss the geological origins of gems and the human consequences of mining practices. Additional discussions in this section highlight the ecological effects of mining, the environmental and human costs of tobacco cultivation, and the shipping of porcelain from China to Europe.

## Publication

*The World Made Wondrous* is accompanied by a Collator publication—available as a PDF or a printed book—through which readers can explore essays and entries by curator Diva Zumaya alongside high-resolution images of thirty-five objects from across LACMA's collection that are featured in the exhibition.

## Credit

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## About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 149,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

**Location:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. [Lacma.org](http://Lacma.org)

**Image captions:** (Left) Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Portrait of Marten Looten*, 1632, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of J. Paul Getty, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; (center left) *Chest with Figures, Flowers, and Birds*, Ryukyu Islands, c. 1650–1750, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Leo Krashen, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; (center right) *Bowl (Wan) with Floral Scrolls*, China, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period, 1662–1722, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Ambassador and Mrs. Edward E. Masters, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; (right) *Dagger Hilt with Triple Lotus Bud Pommel*, India, Mughal empire, c. 1700–50, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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