

SAMUEL QUICCHEBERG

Translation by Mark A. Meadow and Bruce Robertson

Introduction by Mark A. Meadow

THE FIRST TREATISE ON MUSEUMS SAMUEL QUICCHEBERG'S *INSCRIPTIONES* 1565



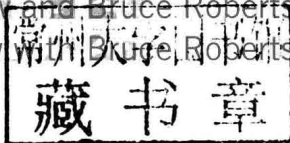
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This volume translates Samuel Quiccheberg, *Inscriptiones; vel, tituli theatri amplissimi* . . . (Munich: Ex Officina Adami Bergi typographi, 1565).

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THE FIRST TREATISE ON MUSEUMS

PREFACE

Wonderful Museums and Quiccheberg's *Inscriptiones*

In 1565, just as the Duke of Bavaria, Albrecht V, began building the first dedicated museum structure north of the Alps, his librarian Samuel Quiccheberg published the first museological treatise. Quiccheberg imagined, however, not just a single building but an entire complex devoted to collecting, research, display, and education that involved all the arts, all industry and sciences, and the natural world. This idealized conception of a governmental center for the production of knowledge has a very long subsequent history, as does the heart of Quiccheberg's enterprise, the museum. This basic notion of how object collections, research, and teaching may be gathered together can be seen on the Mall in Washington, D.C.; South Kensington in London; Museum Island in Berlin; Museum Circle in Cleveland, Ohio; and Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles (specifically, the juxtaposition of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art with the Page Museum and the La Brea Tar Pits, not to mention the Architecture and Design Museum and the Petersen Automotive Museum across the boulevard). Even the modern research university reflects Quiccheberg's conception.

But what does Quiccheberg's ideal *Wunderkammer* (curiosity cabinet) actually have to say to us about how modern museums are organized and the cultural and epistemological tasks they perform? In 2011, the Smithsonian, one of the world's largest modern museum complexes, opened an exhibition called *The Great American Hall of Wonders* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, which is housed in the Old Patent Office Building.¹ The exhibition was an attempt to reconceive the history of the Smithsonian's museum enterprise, and nineteenth-century American culture in general, as one imbued with wonder. I suspect this would have come as a shock to the institution's founders as well as to the builders of the Patent Office, and even to the founders of the Smithsonian American Art Museum (or National Gallery, as it was originally called). They all celebrated the rationality of their work, the evenhanded unfolding of ideal and certain taxonomies, straightforward categories, facts and figures, maps, and narratives. For mid-nineteenth-century audiences and institutions, and well into the twentieth century, wonder was an emotion, fit for children and women; it was not a tool for analysis, critical thinking, research, and ideas. How then should we interpret Quiccheberg's wonder-ful museum? Can our interest in his treatise be anything more than historical, when the epistemological foundation

of his museum is seemingly so antithetical to the way the production of knowledge is conducted today?

Kunstkammern (art cabinets) and *Wunderkammern* have proliferated in the last few decades as objects of scholarship, modes of display practice, and actual installations. A spate of scholarly books beginning in the late 1970s—including those by Elizabeth Scheicher in Austria, Adalgisa Lugli in Italy, Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor in Great Britain, and Krzysztof Pomian in France—are significant instances of this proliferation.² Early *Wunderkammern* were re-created with the reconstruction and reinstallation of the Danish royal *Kunstammer* in 1977 and *Schloss Ambras* at about the same time, with an ideal *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer* reconstructed (for sale) by the dealers Colnaghi in London in 1981.³ Starting with Adalgisa Lugli's installation at the Venice Biennale in 1986 (part of the event's overall theme of art and science), which mixed modern art with *naturalia* (natural objects) and *mirabilia* (marvels), museum exhibitions of both contemporary art and historical material followed rapidly.⁴ *Age of the Marvelous* (1991), curated by Joy Kenseth, and *Wunderkammern des Abendlandes* (1994), both purely historical exhibitions, were extremely influential. Temporary and permanent collection installations in major museums have also become common, as, for example, in the Walters Art Museum or the National Gallery of Art. With the Museum of Modern Art's installation in 2008 of a permanent collection print exhibition titled *Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities*, one realizes that the device has become ubiquitous in contemporary art.

Since the 1980s, many contemporary artists have made *Wunderkammern* on every scale a normal part of their practice, with figures such as Mark Dion using the *Wunderkammer* as a model for installations in museums.⁵ The notion of artists intervening in historical collections goes back at least to Andy Warhol's exhibition *Raid the Icebox*, staged at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Museum of Art in 1969 and using materials from storage, sometimes still in their storage cabinets.⁶

The tactic of assembling university collections in the manner of a *Wunderkammer*, as a way of reinvigorating them by startling the visitor with the breadth and variety of the material basis of academic knowledge, is also now commonplace. Ostensibly displaying research objects, these installations habitually gain their force through what have become relatively widespread *Wunderkammer* strategies for exhibitions: weird or startling juxtapositions, extreme disparities of scale or material, or simple grotesquerie. The examples at the Art, Design and Architecture Museum at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and others I have seen—at the Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles; the Weisman Art Museum at the University of

Minnesota; and the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin—have all been organized by art historians, with one exception: the very interesting exhibition *Ausgepakt: Die Sammlungen der Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg* at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg.⁷

This route to the Wunderkammer through art and artists reminds us that the root of the interest in the curiosity cabinet as a mode of visual display derives from surrealist installation strategies of the 1930s.⁸ The Wunderkammer, as it has reemerged in contemporary consciousness and become part of the practice of artists and museums, has been predicated on notions of the bizarre, the accidental, and the unsystematic, and as antithetical or an antidote to the hyperrational claims of taxonomic systems and systematic organization in general. Contemporary curiosity cabinets are generally presented to overwhelm the modern viewer with an irrational dazzle of objects—trivial, overmanipulated, found, obscure, and anything but explicable.

But Quiccheberg's treatise on the Wunderkammer—the first printed museum treatise—is not about some nostalgic trip to a wonderland of bizarre objects. It is an ambitious attempt to outline why the desire to create curiosity cabinets was becoming so gripping just at this point in European culture. Assembling and displaying physical objects offered sixteenth-century intellectuals a powerful means to access new knowledge, knowledge that lay outside the realm of texts, incorporating practical, empirical, and artisanal knowledge into the realm of the written word. Quiccheberg's inscriptions and classes serve to map out and organize the collectibility of the material world, but they do so for a greater purpose than to taxonomize it. Above all, Quiccheberg sees the goal of his ideal cabinet as practical: the acts of collecting and organizing mobilize objects into their greatest usefulness. Moreover, the interrelatedness of a collection—the juxtaposition of objects, or groupings of objects—enhances the practical value of any single object. An encyclopedic collection allows the user to extract the maximum information from the individual artifact or specimen, but even smaller collections have their usefulness. The heart of Quiccheberg's museum lies in the amassing of stuff. However, as his treatise underscores at every level, this collection is never random or quixotic. For Quiccheberg, wonder and curiosity are part of the armature of rationality, as Mark Meadow's discussion will make clear.

But if we do not see Quiccheberg as contributing to these contemporary art practices that take such pleasure in their antirational impulses, what does this treatise offer of practical value to the modern museum? What can we learn from Quiccheberg's map of the material world? Perhaps the first thing to recognize is the narrowness of contemporary ambitions for knowledge to be acquired from the museum: what do we really learn from museums anymore? The great

age of collecting and organizing collections was the late nineteenth century, when the most extravagant claims for museums were made. Since then there has been the odd paradox of intense multiplication of the number and type of museums matched with their declining ambitions. Art museums are perhaps the narrowest of the lot, organizing the display of their collections almost exclusively chronologically and geographically, a system settled on before the end of the eighteenth century. Universities in particular have found themselves encumbered with collections even as the disciplines within which they were formed seem to have moved on: taxonomy, once dominant in biology, is sidelined; field geology, linguistics, and anthropology are now all subfields within their disciplines. And many universities in the United States have shut down their collections. Even in public science museums, the mere display of objects no longer suffices, as it did in the nineteenth century. Where science museums were once dominated by acres of specimen cases, now these have been relegated to backstage while interactive displays occupy the front of the house. The Victorian ideal of a public that would benefit from the new knowledge embedded in objects has evaporated, and in some ways we have returned to the situation Quiccheberg promoted: the museum is most useful to its users, not its viewers. Indeed, with this belief that collections are to be used, not just viewed, Quiccheberg asserts their fundamental research and scholarly value.

Also relevant is Quiccheberg's insistence on thinking self-consciously about matters of lighting, display, and storage as not just backstage issues that take place out of sight of the viewer. In Quiccheberg's view, these are in the foreground, as he delineates how best to put things out on tables or shelves and how to position them in relationship to the rubrics and titles above them. He concludes, in the last inscription in the last class, with a collection of containers for everything in the preceding inscriptions. What this focus suggests is the way in which display conditions and methods can be used to enhance not merely the viewer's perception but also the acquisition of knowledge. For Quiccheberg, this is a part of his larger strategy of empowering the visitor. And it suggests a powerful avenue of exploration for contemporary museums to follow.

There has been considerable discussion in the last few decades about the role of the omniscient voice of the curator, particularly in art museums but also in anthropology and history museums, and the need to open up the control of knowledge production within the exhibition and allow the visitor in. Quiccheberg urges us to render that physical apparatus, and the curatorial apparatus, more transparent as well.

Within the last two decades it has become common wisdom that constructing tight linear narratives for exhibitions is often self-defeating. Studies have shown over and over again that visitors find their own way through exhibitions,

despite the deployment of every technique available to restrict the passage to the narrative thread ordained by the curator.⁹ While visitors will learn much that a curator offers, both the point of entry into the exhibition and what can be taken away from it are determined by the visitor, by what the visitor brings to it. Whether we realize it or not, casual visitors are also active users of collections, just not in the way curators would like them to be.

What Quiccheberg offers instead is not one linear narrative but an open-ended set of associative possibilities. Despite the clear order of his inscriptions—descending from God through the founder's family to the arts and crafts, then to fauna and flora, and finally to the boxes to put it all in—this firm order in the text is simply ordained by the linearity of old-fashioned textuality. We can imagine how Quiccheberg would have appreciated the flexibility of hypertext. He would also, no doubt, have loved to surf the Internet. He would have appreciated the sense of having access to all that is known and knowable at his fingertips.

Above all, Quiccheberg values the universal collection, the collection that relates all of its individual artifacts and specimens to one another. He was already aware of the distinction between *Kunstkammer* and *Wunderkammer* (and no doubt *Schatzkammer* [collection of objets d'art] and *Rüstkammer* [collection of armor]), but he treated these as less-than-ideal responses for the financially challenged. More objectionable would be our division into specialized museums in art, anthropology, history, and science, and the removal of workshops and libraries from them. Quiccheberg envisioned a single physical space, or close co-location, that would contain the collection, printing presses, pharmacies, armories, and so on. Even if they were to be separated physically, they were still contained institutionally, all housed under the court. Moreover, all users were well known to the collector and his officials.

This is perhaps the biggest difference between Quiccheberg's conception and any present applicability: the social context. Quiccheberg never envisaged a public museum in the sense we understand by the term *public*, even if his ideal *Wunderkammer* was more permeable than is often assumed today. Within the realm of the modern public state, there is little will to devote resources to elite enterprises or to those without self-evident economic rewards. But Quiccheberg understood that, too: his museum is productive, accessible, useful. These are terms we should be able to apply to any museum today as well.

At the heart of Quiccheberg's *Inscriptiones* are his classes: they are his starting point and the rest is explication and digression. As Quiccheberg makes clear, in the end organization matters as much as the material; the act of grouping, ordering, and systematizing is what produces knowledge. One object is silent; two tell a story; and three tell multiple stories and must be approached with a sense of order,

with a theory in mind. But we need to remember emphatically that these are in the service of, as much for Quiccheberg as for us now, the production of not just knowledge but the knowledgeable viewer, not a passive, merely contented viewer.

Notes

1. Perry 2011.
2. Scheicher et al. 1977; Lugli 1983; Impey and MacGregor 1985; and Pomian 1990.
3. Cannon-Brookes 1981.
4. Lugli 1986a.
5. Sheehy 2006.
6. Warhol and Ostrow 1969.
7. Andraschke and Ruisinger 2007.
8. Such as the *Exposition internationale du surréalisme*, Paris, 1938.
9. See, for example, Roberts 1997.

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As is fitting for an edition of a treatise that valorizes the production of knowledge from object collections, the starting point for this translation was an exhibition organized in conjunction with a graduate seminar in 1995–96. This exhibition, *Microcosms: Objects of Knowledge*, compared the ways sixteenth-century cabinets and contemporary universities organized and used objects. We are very grateful to Dr. Marla Berns, former director of the University Art Museum (now the Art, Design and Architecture Museum) at the University of California, Santa Barbara, for her invitation to curate this show, in which we first explored Samuel Quiccheberg's *Inscriptiones* as a system for knowledge production.

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—Mark A. Meadow and Bruce Robertson

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INTRODUCTION

The *Inscriptiones; vel, tituli theatri amplissimi* (Inscriptions; or, Titles of the most ample theater), written by the Flemish physician Samuel Quiccheberg (see pl. 1) and printed in October 1565 by Adam Berg in Munich, is the earliest-known treatise on collecting and museums. Begun in 1563, while Quiccheberg was working with the collections of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria (see pl. 3), the *Inscriptiones* exists in two forms: a manuscript from 1565, which Samuel's brother Leo took to Italy in search of a Venetian publisher; and the published version, which is translated in this volume. The *Inscriptiones* lays out guidelines for assembling an ideal princely *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer* (an encyclopedic collection encompassing all aspects of human artifice and of nature). In the course of the book, Quiccheberg presents, among other things: an organizational system for a vast, encyclopedic collection; a quite thorough list of the sorts of objects one might acquire; a set of largely pragmatic explanations for why the expense and effort of building up a collection is worthwhile; an interlinked system of workshops, studios, and exhibition spaces to which the *Kunstkammer* is related; practical suggestions for how to store and display the myriads of objects recommended for acquisition; and a survey of exemplary contemporaneous collectors. As a historical source, the *Inscriptiones* provides invaluable insight into how and why these vast and (for modern observers) often perplexing early museums came into being.

While art historians, historians of museums, and other scholars have long recognized the importance of Quiccheberg's text, this is the first complete English translation to be published. Much of the text is written in a cryptic, abbreviated style, with promises of more thorough explanations in the next edition. Furthermore, the Berg edition was hastily produced. According to notations in the manuscript Leo Quiccheberg took to Italy, the initial outline of the classes and inscriptions and the section on associated workshops were drafted by October 1563, with the rest of the text (except the dedicatory poems) completed by April 1565.¹ By May, revisions of the manuscript were completed.² In the four months leading to publication, the sections were reordered, the text partially rewritten, and the book typeset and printed. The problem of translating the text is exacerbated by the fact that Quiccheberg had to adapt the Latin to account for a new phenomenon, the *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer* itself. The

scholarly apparatus in this edition is intended to make the text clearer for modern readers. In our translation, we have worked to retain the syntax and flavor of Quiccheberg's text while preserving comprehensibility.

As groundbreaking as Quiccheberg's book was in establishing a literature on museums and collecting, it is worth sounding a few notes of caution concerning the conclusions we can draw from it. First, modern scholars have often considered the *Inscriptiones* to be a foundational text for the currently burgeoning field of museum theory.³ In some ways, though not all, this reputation misconstrues the text. As Quiccheberg makes clear, he was offering not a theoretical disquisition on an established cultural institution but a very practical book to aid princes and others in assembling a new and very practical kind of collection, which he refers to variously as a *theatrum sapientiae* (theater of wisdom), a *conclavium* (a secure space under lock and key), a *Kunstkammer*, a *Wunderkammer*, and a *museum*. The *Inscriptiones* is a how-to book, closer in tone to the many "books of secrets" then being published in Germany (which offered instructions on how to compound medicines, how to smelt and forge metals, how to fence, and so forth) than to scholarly tomes on medicine, law, or theology. Put another way, the *Inscriptiones* is technical and concrete, rather than theoretical and abstract, in its aims. Indeed, at the start of his *Digressions and Clarifications* (henceforth the *Digressions*), Quiccheberg clearly states that he is unconcerned with the hermetic, astrological, or cosmological premises that underlie such texts as Giulio Camillo's *L'idea del teatro*, a treatise on the memory theater with which the *Inscriptiones* is often associated. Even in his use of the term *theater* itself, the author is careful to explain that he refers to particular architectural forms that facilitate viewing rather than to the metaphorical sense in which the term was frequently used in book titles of the period.⁴

Moreover, this slim octavo volume, sixty-four pages in length, is only a preliminary sketch of Quiccheberg's thoughts about collections, which he intended to elaborate upon at much greater length in a later edition. Quiccheberg's untimely death in 1567, only two years after the *Inscriptiones* was printed, precluded a second version. Repeatedly, Quiccheberg alludes to his plans to expand his discussion of various inscriptions such as heraldry and numismatics. In fact, we should probably understand the book as a form of job application, in which Quiccheberg points out the many useful things he could accomplish through his continued employment as collections manager for Albrecht V.⁵

Was the treatise ever used in the creation or organization of any early modern collections? No *Kunstkammer*, including that of Albrecht V in Munich, exactly matches Quiccheberg's system of classes and subclasses in its layout. This is hardly surprising, since Quiccheberg makes clear that the system is not to be understood as a literal installation guide for the display rooms. Few copies

of the treatise survive today and the book does not appear to have been very widely distributed. Intended only as a preliminary edition, it is likely that the book had a very limited print run. More fruitful for gauging how informative the *Inscriptiones* might be concerning collecting in Quiccheberg's day are the social networks in which he was embedded, which link him directly or at most only one or two steps removed from almost all of the major players in the development of collections and museums throughout sixteenth-century Europe. For this reason, brief biographical details of the persons named in the treatise are provided in endnotes to the translation. Circumstantial evidence suggests that Quiccheberg's ideas were available to the various princes of the Habsburgs and Wittelsbachs, to innovative merchant collectors like the Fuggers, and to the Medici of Florence, among many others. The Exemplars, the section of the book devoted to naming important collectors and scholars in diverse fields, is extremely valuable for tracing the many strands of Quiccheberg's social and intellectual world.

Despite these caveats, the *Inscriptiones* presents the most extensive and substantive statement in the sixteenth century about collecting in general and the Kunst- and Wunderkammer phenomenon in particular. Indeed, it is the pragmatic and at times mundane tone of Quiccheberg's treatise that offers the most instructive insight about collections of the period. Quiccheberg recognized that the princes and patricians he addressed were not necessarily interested in (or always quite up to) the esoteric concept of universal knowledge advanced by Camillo and were far more likely to embark on creating such collections if they could see both the pleasure and the practical utility in doing so: "We are not dividing up for philosophers, precisely in line with nature itself, all natural objects; rather, we are sorting out for princes, into certain uncomplicated orderings, objects that are mostly pleasant to observe."⁶

The kind of pragmatic collection Quiccheberg envisions in his book was still in its infancy, especially as a princely institution. In several places, the author explicitly states that he has written the book in order to encourage and stimulate noblemen, patricians, and others to take up for the first time this new form of collecting, each according to his or her interests and means.⁷

We can look to some of Quiccheberg's early experiences for the origin of his practical interests: assisting the Nuremberg apothecary Georg Öllinger in the completion of his medicinal herbal and organizing the Fugger family's library and collections, both discussed below. Within the context of the Munich court, however, the pragmatic functions of collections were already part of an ongoing debate between the duke and his advisory council.

As early as 3 July 1557, the Bavarian court Council of State sent Albrecht V a report that tried to rein in his expenditures. In addition to lectures about such

matters as the costs of extravagant clothing and lavish feasts, the council also addressed Albrecht's interest in collecting:

Furthermore, the council should also caution that His Princely Grace should not imitate the city burghers and merchants in the acquisition of various strange luxuries, as these merchants have unfortunately managed to lead great rulers, electors, and princes to the point that, because of their prodigality and extravagance, they have to finance and support their splendor and luxury.⁸

This is a remarkable admonition in many ways. To begin with, it signals that the collecting of rarities and exotica in Munich was already a well-entrenched practice in the late 1550s, although the Munich *Kunstammer* did not come into formal existence until 1565. Further, it adverts to the fact that such collecting involved a sufficiently high level of expenditure to rise to the level of a matter of state. Perhaps most significantly, the council attributes primacy to the merchants in developing this new form of collection, placing the princes in the position of imitators. This is a stark reversal of the usual narrative concerning the origins of early modern encyclopedic collections, which sees them first appearing with princes and then imitated by members of the middle class keen on advancing themselves socially.

The issue that lay at the heart of this stern warning concerned not just the amount of money being spent but also the propriety of using state funds, instead of his personal household accounts, for collecting. Albrecht was not pleased at the personal critique contained in the council's admonition as a whole, and strongly expressed his displeasure in a letter dated 8 July of the same year. Albrecht's response, interestingly enough, is written in the hand of Hans Jakob Fugger, a merchant banker from Augsburg.⁹ Hans Jakob Fugger and his family were major collectors in their own right, with a fully developed *Wunderkammer* some thirty years before that of princes like Albrecht.¹⁰ Hans Jakob was a direct catalyst in transforming the Bavarian collections and those of the Habsburgs into what we now recognize as fully fledged Renaissance *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammern*. Thus, for assistance in drafting his rebuttal to the council, Albrecht turned to the one person who perhaps most exemplified the "burghers and merchants" he had been warned not to imitate in the "acquisition of various strange luxuries."

Albrecht and his council continued to bicker about financing for years.¹¹ What we might see as his final response, at least in regard to collecting, comes from the second section of the *Inscriptiones*, the Recommendation and Advice, in which Quiccheberg spells out why a prince should develop collections on this