



THE NAUTILUS CUP FROM THE SEVENTEENTH TO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: FROM THE SHELL IN THE CABINET TO THE CABINET IN THE SHELL?

The Nautilus Cup with Neptune and a Siren Shaft

A silver-gilt Neptune riding a sea monster crowns a spiral nautilus shell whose outer layer has been removed, revealing the mother of pearl. The shell rests on a base decorated with reliefs and a shaft in the form of a two-tailed siren (fig. 1). A canine-like mythical creature resembling a figurehead is affixed to the lip of the cup. Small insects, snails, and fruits have been embossed into the plate of the two-levelled base. A gem-studded mount connects the exotic nautilus shell to the ornately designed shaft. This object, which is 34 cm in height, is not only an impressive example of the play between nature and art, but also exemplifies the rich variety of ornate configurations of exotic nautilus shells, in which the creative, metamorphic urge of nature has been pushed beyond itself.¹

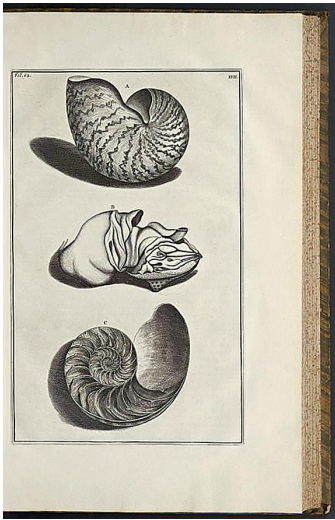
The mise-en-scène of this nautilus cup could not be more symbolic of the different perspectives from which it can be considered and understood. Since their introduction into European collection and exhibition culture, composite objects such as this have been classified in museum holdings and presented according to various points of view. In this context, objects made of nautilus shells have assumed a special role. The heyday of nautilus vessels, which ran parallel to the boom in art and curiosity cabinets, occurred between 1560 and 1680, that is, during a period in which the nautilus was still a rarity.² The nautilus cup then experienced a second heyday in the nineteenth century during the boom in decorative arts and became its allegory,³ since in the nautilus “the beautiful was married to the useful.”⁴ The third significant phase of this genre of objects within collection and exhibition practices is the present day, where its multi-layered semantics is used in very different ways. Here, too, the context of art and curiosity cabinets is of central importance, whereby the nautilus cup appears to have been promoted to the very symbol of the early modern collection model.

Nautilus Pompilius and Nautilus Vessels

Nautilus cups were widespread in Europe and Asia⁵ as “beautiful drinking bowls.”⁶ Such cups were made from a nautilus shell, the spiral shell of a pelagic mollusc from the cephalopod family Nautilidae, especially the *Nautilus pompilius* LINNAEUS 1758. The habitat of the *Nautilus pompilius* is the tropical waters of the western Pacific and eastern Indian Oceans.⁷ “One will find them in all the seas of the Moluccan Islands, as well as around the thousand islands before *Batavia* (Jakarta) and *Java*, but usually only the empty shell, because the animal is seldom found, unless it crawls into the weels”,⁸ conchologist Georg Eberhard Rumphius wrote in his book *The Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*, originally published in 1705.⁹ Rumphius’s title was drawn from Ambon Island in the Moluccas (formerly Amobyna), where he lived beginning in 1657, initially working for the Dutch East India Company, and where he also died. Rumphius’s book deals with the tropical

◀ 1 | Nautilus cup with Neptune and a siren shaft, Museum of Decorative Arts, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

- 1 On the principle of metamorphosis in the nautilus cup, see Bredenkamp 2009, esp. pp. 212–13. This nautilus cup, presumably created in Antwerp or Nuremberg in the late sixteenth century, was located in the Berlin Kunstkammer beginning in 1752 and is now listed in the Museum of Decorative Arts (Kunstgewerbemuseum) as SMB K3887; see Hildebrand/Theuerkauff 1981, pp. 109–10, cat. no. 37.
- 2 See Mette, pp. 95–148.
- 3 See *ibid.*, pp. 7–15, 95–148.
- 4 Sombart 1908.
- 5 Rumphius 1999, p. 90.
- 6 See, for example, the description in Hainhofer 1613, p. 857, cited in Mette 1995, p. 32.
- 7 See Jereb/Roper 2005, p. 53.
- 8 Rumphius 1999, p. 89.
- 9 *Ibid.*; see most recently Leukner et al. 2020.



2 | *Nautilus pompilius*, illustration from Georg Eberhard Rumphius, *D'Amboinische Rariteitkamer*, 1705.

mollusc, which he investigated on location, establishing his own collection.¹⁰ Rumphius was one of the first to study the *Nautilus pompilius* in detail, the shell as well as the animal itself (fig. 2). He identified it as a shellfish and classified it as the most important one.¹¹

Until the end of the fifteenth century, the coveted shell of the *Nautilus pompilius* came to Europe from the Orient over continental trade routes.¹² In the sixteenth century, Portugal was the leading trading centre. Merchant ships sailed from Lisbon to the Indo-Pacific to import exotic goods.¹³ With the establishment of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1602, an increasing number of goods, including nautilus shells, arrived in the Western world from distant locations. As one of the headquarters of the VOC, Amsterdam became the central European hub for the trade in curiosities.¹⁴ Goods were also purchased there for the Brandenburg-Prussian *Kunstammer*. In 1690, Christoph Ungelter, administrator of the *Kunstammer* at the time, applied for a budget of several thousand guilders to purchase art treasures and rarities in Holland [●1685/1688].¹⁵ Nautilus shells arrived in Augsburg or Nuremberg from the European trading centres for exotica, primarily via merchants such as the Fuggers, and from there were sent to goldsmiths to be set.¹⁶ From the Late Middle Ages to 1900, this already costly natural product was made even more valuable through fire-gilt silver fittings, and in some cases the shells were also ornately decorated by mother-of-pearl carvers using various techniques.¹⁷ In this way, the smiths combined the shell and the fittings into new forms – into ships, for example, or animals such as ostriches. As cups, they could assume the form of monsters' mouths, while their shafts were given various figurative motifs. Some of the shells were also made into pitchers and pouring vessels. Rumphius described how nautilus shells were worked around 1700:

One should place a complete one in something sour for 10 to 12 days, such as spoiled rice, vinegar, or water that had grape leaves rotting in it, and then the outer shell will come away, which one should rub away by means of hard scouring. . . . The next three or four chambers are cut out entirely, and one cuts a small open helmet in the innermost curl, and one can carve all kinds of figures on every side of the little boat, rubbing them with crushed coals mixed with wax or oil, until they stand out in black.¹⁸

Nautilus shells fashioned in this way have survived to the present in the Museum of Decorative Arts (*Kunstgewerbemuseum*) of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, and there is also a specimen in the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin. A number of these are the work of famous Dutch mother-of-pearl carver Cornelis van Bellekin, who was a virtuoso with the nautilus shell.¹⁹ While we know that the objects in the Museum of Decorative Arts came from the *Kunstammer*,²⁰ research is currently being conducted on the nautilus shell in the Museum für Naturkunde.²¹ As an object worked by human hand, it is conspicuous in the mollusc collection there and very likely of *Kunstammer* provenance (fig. 3).

Typical *Kunstammer*

Especially when refined by human hand, the nautilus possessed a complex semantics that made it particularly attractive for cabinets of art and curiosities. This was also the case with other rare and exotic natural objects like ostrich eggs and coconuts that could be fashioned into vessels such as goblets and cups. Various designations were used for the *Nautilus pompilius* in the inventories

10 See Hoppe 2005.

11 See Rumphius 1999, pp. 86–91.

12 See Mette 1995, pp. 33–4; Eberle 2010, p. 82.

13 See *ibid.*, pp. 35–6.

14 See Collet 2010, pp. 320–21; Mette p. 145.

15 See the correspondence in Ungelter/Bock 1690, fols. 38–9.

16 See Mette 1995, pp. 35–6.

17 On the different decorative shapes of the nautilus, see Mette, pp. 75–94.

18 Rumphius 1999, p. 90.

19 Bellekin probably began carving mother of pearl around 1650. Many of his works include depictions of peasant and parish fairs. Also characteristic of Bellekin is the bas-relief design evident in the head on the shell whorl; see Mette 1995, p. 79.

20 For example, SMB K 3459, K 3469, K 3471, K 3472, K 3559, or K 3560.

21 ZMB/Moll 103761.



of early modern collections prior to the unification of Linnaeus's *Systema naturae*, which explains the intersection of terms such as mussel, snail, pearl, and mother of pearl.²² Around 1700, the designation “mother-of-pearl snail” was commonly used.²³

3 | Cornelis van Bellekin (presumed), nautilus shell with black engraved images, ca. 1660, Museum für Naturkunde.

In both its refined and its unworked form, the *Nautilus pompilius* was a desired collector's item and an object of interest for various scientific disciplines, not only due to its exotic origin, size, and aesthetics, but also because of its interior structure, which represented a perfect logarithmic spiral. Not only did it become an object for natural scientists such as Rumphius, but its shell, in particular, was regarded as proof of the existence of mathematical laws in nature at a time when scientists such as Johannes Kepler sought to comprehend the macrocosm-microcosm relationship by means of mathematical methods.²⁴

There were nautilus objects in the Brandenburg-Prussian *Kunstammer* as well. The earliest recorded evidence of this can be found in the inventory of 1605, although the holdings listed there were largely destroyed during the Thirty Years' War.²⁵ These included “two goblets, with mother of pearl, framed in gilt silver with lids”, “a snail framed in silver, with a silver lid and gilt edge, everything unweighed”, “two unmounted mother-of-pearl snails”, and “four mother-of-pearl snails mounted in gilt silver, two with lids and two without lids”.²⁶ At the beginning of the

22 See Mette 1995, pp. 31–2, 40–1.
 23 Rumphius [Rumpf] 1766, p. 6.
 24 See Bredekamp 2009a, pp. 212–15; Bredekamp 1995, p. 37; Mette 1995, pp. 44–57.
 25 See Theuerkauff 1981b, p. 13.
 26 Inventar 1605, fols. 18r, 19r, 24v, 25r.

seventeenth century, the Brandenburg-Prussian *Kunstammer* had more the character of a treasure chamber, within which the mounted and unmounted nautilus symbolized magnificence and wealth [● Around 1600]. In 1605 – that is, during the primary phase of nautilus vessel production – the nautilus was still a rarity. Because of the increased interest in exotic goods, the trade became professionalized so that such objects could also increasingly be purchased from local dealers, which meant they were more easily accessible to a larger circle of collectors. This, however, also meant that these natural objects lost the status of rarities.²⁷

Due to the sustained fascination, however, objects made from the nautilus were again purchased for the *Kunstammer*. The inventory of 1685 lists in the catalogue of naturalia “three Indian large pearl snails that have been artistically broken apart and on which all sorts of figures have been engraved.”²⁸ These were certainly artfully worked shells from *Nautilus pompilius*. They were located in the display case of naturalia and were thus classified as objects of nature, despite having been refined by human hand. This display case “had two more drawers containing three large and four small Indian sea snails. . . . Similar sea snails, different kinds [addition written in another hand: But have not been sorted in the drawer . . .].”²⁹ Thus the three large “pearl snails” with figurative depictions were stored separately from the other conches and were also presented differently within the naturalia case. While the unworked shells were hidden in a drawer, the three conches with figurative depictions were displayed openly in the compartment next to three coconut shells with carved histories as well as stones with petrified fish³⁰ – that is, natural objects that had become image carriers [● 1685/1688].

Until the end of the eighteenth century, nautilus shells and vessels were rarely mentioned in existing sources from the *Kunstammer*.³¹ In 1688, three pearl snails were designated as shattered (*zerbrochen*) and for this reason were presumably removed [◆ Intact and Damaged].³² In his *Beschreibung der königlichen Residenzstädte Berlin und Potsdam* (1769), Friedrich Nicolai identified among “. . . the pieces made from gemstones, mother of pearl, corals, tortoise shell, unicorn, rhinoceros, mussels, and similar materials . . .” and among “the recent works . . . very many artistically processed bowls from the nautilus.”³³ Evidently these had only recently been added to the *Kunstammer* and were works from the eighteenth century. The nautilus cup with Neptune and a siren shaft must have been one of these objects.

Artwork or Decorative Art?

As the nineteenth century progressed and as art history emerged as an academic discipline, increasing attention was paid once again to the objects made from nautilus shells in the Brandenburg-Prussian *Kunstammer*. In the 1830s and 40s, the focus shifted especially to stylistic aspects and the increased importance of attributing a work to a particular artist [■ Cupid / ● Around 1855].³⁴ For example, in his *Leitfaden für die Königliche Kunstammer und das Ethnographische Cabinet zu Berlin* (1844), Ledebur emphasized not only the nautilus cup with Neptune and a siren shaft, but also several shells that had been engraved by Bellekin, “who has also made similar works of value on mother-of-pearl bowls.”³⁵ Ledebur regarded a nautilus cup with a shaft depicting a chained slave³⁶ as noteworthy due to the engravings of a “peasant dance in the style of Teniers.”³⁷ In contrast to this art-historical appreciation, unworked nautilus shells as raw material were no longer considered rarities at this time. Ledebur, for instance, noted the following regarding several

composite objects from the category *Art Objects, Objects of Horn, Conches, Tortoise Shell, Mother of Pearl, Corals*: “. . . has more significance as metalwork of the seventeenth century; the same holds as well for a portion of those drinking bowls for which the nautilus was often used.”³⁸

Between 1855 and 1857, the nautilus objects were moved to the Neues Museum in Berlin, where they were integrated into the redesigned *Kunstammer*.³⁹ The focus of this section was the presentation of art history in general and of Prussian history in particular.⁴⁰ Max Schasler’s description of the exhibition in the Neues Museum in the initial years between 1855 and 1861⁴¹ offered an early impression of the configuration of the five rooms, which he called a “museum of the minor arts, of art industry and historical curiosities.”⁴² Schasler identified the refined nautilus shells in the third hall [●Um 1855, fig. 2], where the majority of the objects were displayed in twelve cases. Internally these cases had been organized primarily according to material and technique, although the objects were also arranged in part chronologically or by provenance. This ordering scheme was reminiscent of the one used in the Ambras Cabinet of Art and Wonders, which had been exhibited after the Congress of Vienna in 1814 in the Lower Belvedere in Vienna according to its original ordering scheme.⁴³ In the *Kunstammer* at the Neues Museum in Berlin, the nautilus objects – all of which were marked with a star in Schasler’s guide as especially worth seeing – were exhibited in the sixth display case, which together with the fifth case contained “valuable metalworks in bronze, silver, etc.”,⁴⁴ including scientific instruments from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here they formed the material category “Nautilus”, which existed independently alongside “Mother of Pearl” and formed a unit together with “Carvings from Ivory, Rhinoceros Horn, and Wood from the Seventeenth Century”.⁴⁵

This appreciation of the material quality of the shell continued in 1872 in the *Exhibition of Older Decorative Art Objects in the Royal Armoury*. In the exhibition guide, which identified only a few objects by name, the nautilus appears *inter alia* in the section “Works by German Goldsmiths, Sixteenth to Seventeenth Centuries”, in which “valuable materials, especially ivory, unusually shaped mussels, especially nautilus, coconuts, the horn of the narwhal and the rhinoceros” were displayed “in plain condition, carved, or engraved”.⁴⁶

The success of the decorative arts exhibition provided an opportunity to transfer of the bulk of the *Kunstammer* holdings at the Neues Museum to a new Museum of Decorative Arts,⁴⁷ thereby definitively sealing the dissolution of the *Kunstammer* [●Around 1855]. Wilhelm von Bode was commissioned to write an expert opinion in which he determined which objects should be transferred from the *Kunstammer* due to their primarily decorative character. In addition to the maiolicas, enamel works, and figurative depictions in amber, he also identified specific objects, including the Pomeranian Art Cabinet [◆Cases, Boxes], the drinking-game automaton with Diana and the stag, and “the nautilus mussels with engraving by Bellekie”.⁴⁸ With this classification as decorative art, the latter were denied the status of independent artworks that Ledebur had still emphasized in 1844.

At the end of the nineteenth century, numerous *Kunstammer* artificialia were transferred to the recently established museums of decorative art and cultural history. It was in these institutions that the early modern cabinets of art and curiosities were revived in new forms in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁴⁹ In this process, the nautilus once again played a central role.

27 See Collet 2010, pp. 320–1; Mette, p. 145.

28 Inventar 1685/1688, fol. 116r.

29 *Ibid.*, fol. 117r.

30 See *ibid.*, fol. 116r.

31 A nautilus is mentioned in the acquisitions book: “An especially rare shell: Nauti[us] cum suo pihcc. proret in mari vellicat et remigat,” *Eingangsbuch 1688/1692b*, fol. 7v. It remains unclear whether this nautilus had been worked on and to what extent it had been classified within the collection.

32 See Inventar 1685/1688, fol. 116r: “are broken”. They are not listed, at least, in the inventory of 1694 and in the inventory of 1735.

33 Nicolai 1769, pp. 341–2.

34 See Kugler 1838, p. 172, 242; Ledebur 1844, p. 24.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

36 SMB K 3459.

37 Ledebur 1844, p. 24. Ledebur is referring here to David Teniers the Younger, who painted numerous peasant scenes on canvas.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

39 See Segelken 2011; Fischbacher 2018, p. 4.

40 See Segelken 2011, pp. 171–4.

41 See *ibid.*, on the *Kunstammer* pp. 204–23.

42 Schasler 1861, p. 201.

43 See Primisser 1819.

44 Schasler 1861, p. 214.

45 See *ibid.*, p. 216.

46 Lessing 1872, pp. 24–5.

47 See Röber 2001, p. 88.

48 SMB-ZA, I/KKM 38, *Auflösung der Kunstammer (1872–1876)*, fol. 51r–58r.

49 For example in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, the Historisches Museum Basel, and the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum.

The Prussia Exhibition of 1981 and the Nautilus Revival

The exhibition *Prussia – Attempt at a Balance Sheet*, curated by Gottfried Korff, was held in 1981 in the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, where the Museum of Decorative Arts of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin was located at the time. The exhibition was accompanied by a special publication on the Brandenburg-Prussian *Kunstammer* and its holdings.⁵⁰ The exhibition was particularly significant because it marked a turning point in the historical reception of Prussia. In terms of presentation as well, the exhibition set new standards, as elements of stage design were integrated here on a large scale for the first time in Germany.⁵¹ There were thirty-three rooms overall; room eight was entitled “An Ordered Image of the World – The Cabinet of Art and Naturalia in the Berlin Palace” and was dedicated to the Brandenburg-Prussian *Kunstammer*. This emphasis on order should be understood as a contrast to Schlosser’s publication – reissued only three years earlier – which had still influenced Reichl’s characterization of his own exhibition in 1930 as a “colourful chaos” [● 1930].⁵²

The exhibition room was recreated from Nicolai’s description of the rooms and holdings in 1786:⁵³ “While the configured cabinet is more like a Renaissance studio . . . the succession of display cases does accord with the organization reported by Nicolai.”⁵⁴ Since Nicolai did not mention any locations in his list of holdings, the arrangement in 1981 was a purely text-based interpretation of the collection in the Berlin Palace, in which a narrative sequence was transferred to a physical one. Like the exhibition of 1930, the Prussia exhibition of 1981 adopted the approach of reconstruction, but this time not according to the existing décor – the palace had been demolished in 1950 – but rather on the basis of a textual foundation that described the collection when it was still arranged encyclopaedically, but when the bulk of the naturalia had already been turned over to the Academy of Sciences in 1735 [■ Monkey Hand].⁵⁵ Of the 143 exhibits or exhibit groups, the naturalia – which were representative objects without *Kunstammer* provenance – thus constituted the smallest group of holdings with only thirteen positions.⁵⁶

Nautilus objects were included in this exhibition both as naturalia and as artificialia. Within the naturalia vitrines, which were organized from top to bottom into zoology, botany, minerals, and conches, a nautilus shell was classified – along with other conches – according to the catalogue designation “Mussels and Snails” (fig. 4). Nicolai did not mention a nautilus in his description, but identified in summary “an abundant snail and mussel cabinet divided into special drawers according to genera and species. These include rare pieces.”⁵⁷ That a nautilus shell might have been among them was an interpretation of the curators.

Parallel to the shells in their natural state, the nautilus cup with Neptune and a siren shaft was displayed together with other composites of nature and art, for instance a snail shell decorated by Bellekin,⁵⁸ an ornate vessel of zebu horn,⁵⁹ and a coral branch artfully set in silver (fig. 5).⁶⁰ Through this complementary presentation as an unworked shell and as a cup, the nautilus symbolically stood not only for the juxtaposition of the domains of nature and art, but simultaneously for their fruitful symbiosis, embodying in its dual presence the encyclopaedic concept of the early modern *Kunstammer* model.

50 See Hildebrand/Theuerkauff 1981.

51 See Baur 2016, especially p. 264.

52 Reichl 1931, p. 16.

53 See Nicolai 1786a, pp. 791–9.

54 Preußen 1981, vol. 1, p. 138.

55 See Ledebur 1831, p. 24.

56 See the appendix with exhibits in Preußen 1981, vol. 1, pp. 139–53.

57 Nicolai 1786a, p. 793.

58 SMB K 3467.

59 SMB K 3429.

60 See Preußen 1981, vol. 1, p. 141.



The Nautilus in Cabinets of Art and Curiosities after 2000

The multi-layered and open semantics of the nautilus has been intensively appropriated in museum exhibitions of cabinets of art and curiosities since 2000.⁶¹ At the *Kunstkammer* in Schloss Friedenstein, which opened in Gotha in 2009, the staging of the historical holdings is in part historicizing and in part modern, with particular emphasis on the material aspect. The exhibition itself consists of five rooms. One of these contains works of amber, ivory, and nautilus shell, which are displayed in hanging cabinets with blue frames and are arranged according to material.⁶² The nautilus shells, all of which are carved and engraved and some of which are also set – including one by Cornelis van Bellekin – have been arranged into a group and illuminated to accentuate their materiality and technical workmanship (fig. 6). As in the aforementioned exhibitions from the nineteenth century, the nautilus is treated here once again as a material category, whereby the focus is not the raw material, but the skilful processing of the shell.

Between 2009 and 2010, the exhibition *A Different Approach to the World: The Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace – A First Look at the Lab* presented the guiding principles of the planned Humboldt Forum in the Altes Museum. In this exhibition, the Brandenburg-Prussian *Kunstkammer*

4 | Vitrine with naturalia at the Prussia Exhibition in Berlin, photo by Margret Nissen, 1981.

5 | Vitrine with artificialia and composite objects at the Prussia Exhibition in Berlin, including the nautilus cup with Neptune and a siren shaft, photo by Margret Nissen, 1981.

61 On cabinets of art and curiosities in current exhibition practice, see Wagner 2021a; Wagner 2021b.

62 On the *Kunstkammer* at Schloss Friedenstein in Gotha, see Eberle 2010; on the room with nautilus objects, see pp. 75–89.



6 | Engraved and carved nautilus cups and bowls in the *Kunstkammer* at Schloss Friedenstein in Gotha.

was highlighted as the historical foundation and model in terms of its character as a laboratory and field of experimentation.⁶³ Various objects from the former *Kunstkammer* were exhibited here, divided into the domains of *naturalia*, *artificialia*, and *scientifica*, including the nautilus cup with Neptune and a siren shaft (fig. 7). Together with a stag’s antler grown into a tree, the engraving of a fox with two tails [Antlers], a plate of ruin marble, and other objects, the nautilus cup was presented as a rarity and play of nature. Since the alcove in which the cup stood was completely lined with mirrors, it could be viewed from all sides and, figuratively speaking, from multiple perspectives in all its facets (fig. 1).

While in the nineteenth century the nautilus cup – especially in the context of cabinets of art and curiosities – was chosen

as the allegory for decorative arts, today, in contrast, the nautilus cup is staged in the context of a decorative arts museum as a representative of *artificialia*, that is, as one of the fundamental categories of cabinets of art and curiosities. In the *Kunstkammer* at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, which opened in 2012, there are twenty-four vitrines embedded in a concave wall. In one of these vitrines, a nautilus cup is displayed together with a lidded ivory goblet depicting a bacchanal and a silver anniversary goblet under the title *Artificialia* (fig. 8). The vitrines in this exhibition all focus on different themes and facets of curiosity cabinets, such as “The Desire to Collect”, “From the Sea”, and “Tortoise Shell”.

63 See Bredekamp 2009b, pp. 30–1.





The *Kunstkammer* at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, which reopened in 2013 with twenty rooms staged in a modern style, is the largest exhibition of its kind.⁶⁴ Numerous nautilus cups and bowls are exhibited here in various contexts. One of them is displayed in a room entitled *Exotica*. It is located in a vitrine containing composite objects of nature and art, including an ostrich egg cup and a sea coconut pitcher (fig. 9). Here the focus is on the origin of the raw material of the object, a non-European product of nature, as had been the case in the decorative arts exhibition of 1872.

In contrast, the *Kunstkammer* at the Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum in Braunschweig (2016) emphasizes the animal itself in its presentation of the nautilus.⁶⁵ The exhibition here consists of a single room in which modern vitrines have been mounted on two walls, one representing the realm of *naturalia* and the other *artificialia*. The *naturalia* are divided into three vertical vitrine elements dedicated to the themes of mineralogy, zoology, and botany. In zoology, a nautilus shell with etched decorations is displayed together with a narwhal reliquary, a carved ostrich egg, and a stuffed parrot. In addition to *naturalia* in their natural state, there are also composite objects as well as *artificialia* imitating nature, such as a sauce boat in the form of a water spider's shell (fig.

8 | View of the *Kunstkammer* in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg.

◀ 7 | Berlin exhibition *A Different Approach to the World*, 2009–10, with the nautilus cup with Neptune and a siren shaft among the *naturalia*.

64 On the *Kunstkammer* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, see Kirchweber 2012; on the exhibition concept, see Haag 2013, pp. 14–19.

65 On the history of the museum, see *250 Jahre Museum* 2004.

9 | Nautilus cup in the exotica room of the *Kunstkammer* in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum*, Vienna.



10). The element connecting all of the objects here is the relation to the animal world, whether at the level of raw material or motif. In this way, objects of art and objects of nature can be presented side by side on equal footing.

The *Kunstkammer* of the dukes of Württemberg, which reopened in the *Landesmuseum Württemberg* in Stuttgart in 2016 and is staged in a modern way,⁶⁶ also includes nautilus objects, which



10 | Vitrine for zoology in the Kunst-kammer room in the Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Braunschweig.

seem to have become as obligatory for this type of exhibition as narwhal tusks [◆ Canon and Transformation]. The special feature of the staging in Stuttgart lies in the detachment from historical and scientific divisions in the conception of the *Kunst-kammer* exhibition, something that had already partially occurred in Hamburg. In Stuttgart, the *Kunst-kammer* consists of three rooms, in which numerous nautilus cups are exhibited according to thematic aspects, for instance “Collecting Wonders” and “Pomp and Splendour” (fig. 11). A large number of splendid vessels made

66 See *Kunst-kammer der Herzöge von Württemberg* 2019.



11 | Vitrine with nautilus objects in the second room of the Kunst-
kammer in the Landesmuseum
Württemberg, Stuttgart, detail
from the virtual tour.

from gold, gems, and also conches are displayed in vitrine with the latter title. The emphasis here is especially on the objects' material and prestigious dimension, the apex of which is attained in the refined form of the natural product. Thus, we come full circle to around 1600, when the nautilus cup had its first heyday in the context of cabinets of art and curiosities.

From the seventeenth to the twenty-first century, the nautilus cup has undergone a transformation in meaning that has drawn upon its complexity and multi-layered semantics and has thereby remained an object of interest to various disciplines. At times its shell stood in the foreground as an exotic rarity, at other times its framing as a precious object, and at still other times its artistic treatment as a medium for images. While these aspects declined in relevance into the nineteenth century, there were attempts in the twentieth century to gain a synoptic perspective on objects of this genre. The nautilus cup is now no longer merely a representative of decorative arts, but rather has become the symbol of the *Kunstkammer* itself.

Translated by Tom Lampert