

**Arranging the Antipodes:
The Archer Family Album as Metaphorical Cabinet**

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Figure 1. "Hand coloured drawing from the front page of the Archer Family album," Brisbane, ca. 1869, API-001-0001-0001, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

While surveying the western coasts of Australia between 1818 and 1822, the naval officer and hydrographer, Phillip Parker King (1791-1856) avowed, “no country [has] ever produced a more extraordinary assemblage of indigenous productions – no country has proved richer than Australia in every branch of natural history” (Moyal 37).¹ His enthusiastic assertion not only situates Australia as a fertile ground for imperial collection, echoing the legacy of Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820) whose personal patronage of the scientific expedition on board the *Endeavour* initiated a reconnaissance of international natural history on an unprecedented scale, but it also provides insight into a popular conceptual paradigm that posited Australia as a land replete with natural wonders.

In this regard, King’s choice of language is particularly noteworthy. His use of the term ‘assemblage’ constructs a vision of Australia as a virtual collection or showcase of natural history phenomena, an organizing trope reminiscent of the cabinet of curiosities, a mode of collection and display that began to gain historical recognition in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with ecclesiastical and princely collections of natural and artificial wonders that ultimately paid homage to the wonder of God. Such collections played upon the senses through the deliberate juxtaposition and artistic composition of their featured objects. Straddling the divide between art and science, the cabinet was primarily a sensory model that relied upon the strategic employment of wonder as a mobilizing mechanism. Subscribing to this cabinet tradition, King’s superlative language is consciously employed to evoke wonder, arouse curiosity, and stir desire in his readers to visually, or perhaps physically, possess the peculiar antipodean riches of Australia.

With its emotive tone and emphasis on material collection, his description also hints at the development of an aesthetic science that evolved out of the popular natural history collecting practices of the nineteenth century. Founded upon sensory knowing, aesthetic science coupled analytical and empirical observation with the imaginative act of contemplating nature as a whole within a culture of creative and strategic display (Wonders 411). Richly evocative in its human associations and its emphasis on the pleasurable experience of the materiality and singularity of natural forms, it was similar in ideology to the cabinet, a concept explored by Lynn Merrill in *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* (1989). Applying Merrill’s theory, I would argue that the cabinet, as a dominant metaphor for aesthetic science, is not only potentially applicable to much of nineteenth-century British exhibition culture connected with the popular natural history movement, but also has particular relevance in colonial outposts such as Australia where direct contact with a strange and marvellous environment provided a rich collecting pool for New World curiosities as is evident in King’s report (115-116).

The collector-lust the region generated well into the twentieth century is expressed in an excerpt from *The Australian Quarterly Journal of Theology, Literature and Science*:

... What a vast field is opened and what brilliant prospects are offered to the Inhabitants of Australia who will then turn his [sic] attention to these pursuits. A fifth portion of the world, new and untrodden, unexplored, invites him to examine her curiosities; and to stimulate him more strongly to make use of those senses,

which have been given to him, presents herself in forms so remarkable, so eccentric, so different from those of every other part of the Globe. (Kohlstedt 2)

Thus described as a land of sensory wonders, Australia provided an ideal model for the cabinet paradigm that was reinforced through the rise of popular natural history and democratic collecting practices in the early to mid decades of the century. Within this environment, the cabinet was reinterpreted in multiple formats, from private collections to commercial venues and public institutions, which contributed to and became a significant part of the popular visual culture of the period.

One of the earliest extant manifestations is the Macquarie Collector's Chest; a private, portable cabinet purported to have belonged to Governor Lachlan Macquarie (1762-1824). With its collage-like arrangements of New South Wales specimens of butterflies, insects, shells, and birds accompanied by a striking pictorial program of 13 oil paintings depicting Australian flora and fauna in local landscape settings, the chest demonstrates a subtle blend of science and art. Aesthetic value and scientific import are given equal status in its dynamic system of display based on the revelation of concealed drawers and compartments. Such private collections were popular amongst the upper classes, the most renowned of which was the natural history cabinet established by the Macleay family at Elizabeth Bay House.²



Figure 2. "Macquarie Collector's Chest," ca. 1818, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

In his analysis on colonial collecting tendencies, Tom Griffiths has described museums from the period, which were basic extensions of such private collections, as "institutional scrapbooks of nature and culture," and, indeed, a parallel can be drawn between the visual program as well as the spatial and operational elements of the cabinet-cum-museum and that of the mid-nineteenth-century album (18). On a fundamental level, the album, like the cabinet, is grounded in the collection and display of objects. Historically,

its origins coincided with the development of the cabinet.³ The practice peaked in the nineteenth century when albums were increasingly employed as convenient and portable repositories for a variety of personally compiled collections.⁴ By the second half of the century, such collections were often miscellaneous in nature, featuring a combination of paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, ephemera, and botanical specimens, as well as hand-written inscriptions, letters, and poetry.

Produced in an era that coincided with the mass diffusion of popular natural history collecting practices, these mixed media albums are distinguished by an indiscriminate mixture of natural and artificial material that shadows the collecting ideology and visual programme of the historic *wunderkammer*. As in the cabinet, their fundamental organising trope is one of aesthetic juxtaposition, a creative taxonomy that weaves together materiality, singularity, and strategic display to form a nexus of associations and sensations that are perpetually reactivated through sight, touch, and movement.⁵ In their appropriation and amalgamation of the dominant scientific, artistic, and exhibitionary movements of the era, these albums display a particularly rich example of late mid-nineteenth-century visual culture characterised by a sophisticated aesthetic vocabulary that merges art, science, and media.

As a categorically evasive material entity, the album has regularly slipped through the cracks in academic analysis, particularly with regards to its mixed media content, arrangement, and modes of display, with a few notable exceptions.⁶ Privileging Merrill's cabinet metaphor, I will argue that the late mid-nineteenth-century Australian album functions as a microcosmic collection of simulated wonders, featuring 'specimens' of drawings, paintings, photographs, and ephemera. Primarily, I will analyse the aesthetic and experiential relationships between the album and contemporary realisations of the cabinet against a backdrop of the popular natural history and exhibition cultures of the period. Within this context, I will examine how aesthetic juxtaposition and display were strategically construed to shape interactive experience through the sensory registering and comparison of assembled forms and through the associative power of the singular artefact. Finally, I will consider the underlying agenda of album assemblage within a colonial context, where under the guise of aesthetic science it operated as an instrument for the subjugation, domestication, and ultimately, colonisation of a new visual and cultural landscape.⁷

THE ARCHER FAMILY ALBUM

Given the vast number of albums produced in upper- and middle-class households in Australia during the second half of the nineteenth century, I will limit my study to an album belonging to the Archer family, prominent pastoralists of Scottish heritage who settled in Queensland in the area west of Rockhampton in 1855.⁸



Figure 3. “Archer family having tea on the lawn at Gracemere,” Gracemere, Queensland, ca. 1872, Mackenzie family photograph album, APO-027-0001-0008, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

Compiled from 1865 to 1874, the Archer family album is highly decorative in nature as was typical of its genre, boasting a rich chestnut brown cover impressed with delicate gold filigree patterns. Displayed in the drawing room, one of the principal sites of social performance throughout the nineteenth century, the album functioned as a dynamic visual prop for the presentation of status and taste.

This visual decadence, however, was but one facet of its sensory experience. Both Geoffrey Batchen and Margaret Langford have discussed how albums, as tactile objects with moving parts, were meant to be experienced fully, not just through visual association, but also through touch, through the manipulation and turning of their pages, as well as aurally, through accompanied narration (Batchen 49, Langford 5). The size of the Archer album promotes such sensory interaction: 34 centimetres in height, it is relatively substantial without being cumbersome; its stature both commands attention and encourages intimacy and portability. Furthermore, its structure is imbued with an inherent theatricality that revolves around the cyclical motion of concealing and revealing. A journey through its pages, in which images are unveiled, presented, and then hidden, is an experience intimately linked with performance and spectacle. This sequence of revelation, based upon the exercise of visual appropriation, is supplemented through physical contact which initiates a performative and temporal cycle of its own, as Susan Stewart has noted, “traversing the boundary between interiority and externality” (35).

In addition to promoting a cabinet-like sensory experience, the album also shared the same fundamental display mechanism of the *wunderkammer*: that of aesthetic

juxtaposition. This compositional methodology is exemplified in the image assemblages that are symptomatic of the Archer album which recall the collage-like arrangements of specimens in the Macquarie Chest. Containing 57 pages composed of heavy cream-coloured stock, the album is filled with a mixed pictorial programme of drawings and clippings of native flora and fauna, together with photographs of domestic interiors, gardens, and buildings in and around Brisbane, in addition to numerous images of indigenous people and various poetic inscriptions and signatures.

The majority of compositions are unsigned, implying the communal nature of the album which functioned as an object of social exchange and would have been compiled by a number of different people including Archer family members, their friends, and social acquaintances, amongst which featured Governor and Lady Bowen. The compositional style of the album shifts from page to page, perhaps mirroring the shift in contributors, and varies from single-page compositions featuring a sole photograph or drawing framed against a blank background, to crafted images surrounded by decorative borders as in the embellished shield on the title page (Figure 1), to highly ornamental spreads that employ a mixture of media, including photographs, drawings, and chromolithographic prints. These combination pages do not necessarily display a unified pictorial vision but instead consist of juxtaposed images that retain a degree of ambiguity.

One such example is a decorative page near the back of the album which displays a bipartite composition consisting of a cut-out black and white print of a young woman leaning against an ivy-clad tree, gently pressing her lips to a pair of entwined hearts engraved on its trunk (49). Flanking the print are two drawings of a patch of bark bearing carved initials on one side and a date in roman numerals on the other. This composite sentimental lovers' souvenir rests above a watercolour of a lyrebird in the bush, accompanied by a stanza of romantic poetry describing the bird. The dynamism of the collage-like composition, generated by a system of arbitrary alignment and sense of scale, serves to reinforce the diversity and materiality of its components as well as to encourage a visual exploration of its formal similarities and differences.

However, while all of the elements combine to form an aesthetically pleasing and multidimensional image with romantic overtones, the specific relationship between the individual parts is difficult to decipher. Barbara Stafford has shown that such aesthetic juxtaposition exposed the ambiguity, uncertainty, and fundamental artificiality of systems of categorisation and thus, necessarily invoked the observer to "fill in the gaps," to form his or her own conclusions about the relationships or lack thereof that existed between the displayed items (34). Without the aid, then, of an accompanying explanation, the only narrative the viewer is able to construct of the Archer album composition is an oblique one at best. Ultimately, the page represents an ambivalent space where the lyrebird, the lovesick girl, and the scraps of engraved bark resist complete integration into a unified whole.

An interesting dynamic consequently emerges within the album and cabinet: highly interactive in nature, both initiated a dialogue of constructed meaning that was simultaneously unstable and malleable. Not only did this ambiguous space provide a

window for engaged interpretation on the part of the viewer, but it also represented a vehicle through which the collector-exhibitor could exercise authority and control as the ultimate creator behind the arrangement (Osborne 63). In the appropriation and reframing of objects, the compilers of the Archer album thus transformed a heterogeneous jumble of seemingly unrelated matter into a personalised universe of meaning structured according to an arbitrary classification scheme of their own device.

SENSING SINGULARITY

Nevertheless, despite such inherent ambiguity, on a foundational level the album, like the cabinet, functioned on the stability, indeed, on the sheer materiality of the singular object. In the popular natural history movement of the nineteenth century, the elevation of the singular contributed to the development of a ‘specimen aesthetic’ based on an ingrained belief in the supremacy of the individual object, which resulted in what Merrill describes as the “apotheosis of singularity” (51). Visual manifestations of this aesthetic frequent the pages of the Archer album, one of which is a detailed watercolour of a Copperleaf specimen (7). The subtle nuances of rippling shades of red, the delicate web of veins and irregular serrated edges all attest to the artist’s careful rendition of an actual leaf, which has been faithfully copied and mounted in the centre of a blank page with an affixed label denoting the Latin name of the species, all in a very pseudo-scientific manner that underlines the factuality of the representation.

This specimen aesthetic is also found in other pages of the album which suggest a burgeoning scientific interest in the distinguishing factors of individual species, such as a cut-out engraving of a group of bottle trees accompanied by an underlying inscription which lists the Latin name, typical height and circumference, and location where it was found, in this case, at Jimbour Station, Queensland (54). In addition, an amateur photograph of a Breadfruit Tree at Wide Bay (40) not only represents a specimen as found in nature, but also functions itself as a type of specimen of a new form of technology, the camera, which was employed to render nature in its purest form (Armstrong 93).

This fluid application of media reflects the nineteenth-century intersection of photography, drawing, and natural history, a cultural phenomenon explored by Carol Armstrong in her work, *Ocean Flowers: Impressions from Nature* (2004). Within the Archer family album, the faithfully rendered Copperleaf, the engraving of bottle trees, and the photograph of the Breadfruit tree all represent specimens of the natural world that were worthy enough to be collected and preserved for display. In this sense, they not only function as scientific specimens, but also simultaneously represent singular artefacts interwoven with the personal experience of their collection.

In an ideological shift championed by Walter Benjamin, these images have taken on the ritual value associated with the materiality of their original, objective forms (65-67). Fleshed out in myriad detail and supported by palpable facts, they retain a vestigial materiality that alludes to the “pleasures of the concrete world” (Merrill ix). Highly possessable in their tangible specificity, such specimens were transformed through desire into wondrous entities; through the fetishisation of their decontextualised materiality,

they became aura-bound objects of singularity, poignant artefacts representing a captured moment in time (Pearce 14). Thus, the brightly blooming wattle and bottlebrush painted on the title page of the Archer album, depicted in Figure 1, functioned both as a celebration of the beauty of nature and as reminders of the fragility and impermanence of life. Similarly, family photographs, letters, and other ephemeral mementos within the album were transformed into relics, while the album itself, as a receptacle, became a type of secular reliquary (Edwards 228).

THE ROMANTIC ENCOUNTER WITH NATURE

From this material base, in which the elevation of the singular specimen or artefact was paramount, the album was employed to emulate an interactive, aesthetic environment based on a romantic view of the experience of nature that was central to the popular natural history movement of the period. This romantic outlook was characterised by a multifaceted approach to vision that, when invoked in the album, was instrumental in the re-contextualisation of its singular objects into simulated settings intended to extend their aura and encourage sensory experience. In addition to promoting a form of temporal vision anchored in the associative artefact, the album revealed this romantic aesthetic in its sense of elastic scope that simultaneously embraced the part and the whole. Just as the Macquarie Chest displays specimens that reflect nature's minutiae coupled with painted landscapes that attempt to encompass a greater view of the local environment, the Archer album contains illustrations of both specimens and their native habitats.

For instance, in addition to featuring a painted Copperleaf specimen, the album also includes a photograph of the garden from whence it came, both 'taken' from, according to their respective inscriptions, Kinellan in 1869 (3). This inclusion contributes to a paradoxical type of split vision in which the combination of the particular and general, the romantic and rational, forms a dynamic union out of which an artificial, multi-dimensional world is created. Other albums from the period display a similarly rich visual range that compounds the specimen and its environment within a realm of artistic simulation. The Eliza Youngusband album, for example, compiled within and around North Adelaide in the late 1850s and early 1860s by the daughter of the well-to-do pastoralist and merchant, William Youngusband (1814-1863), contains an oil painting of a verdant lake scene displaying examples of local flora which has been painted onto the surface of a gum leaf. In this context, the manipulated leaf becomes the subject, canvas, and frame in a complex relationship in which it represents both an actual part and the symbolic whole of the Australian bush (Duggins 6).⁹

Such compositions were based upon carefully orchestrated juxtapositions of the specimen and its environment and often feature the intersection of science and art in their imaginative rendering of the natural world. Within the Archer album, the pages devoted to the bowerbird (2) and the previously mentioned figure of the lyrebird (49) display this dynamic amalgamation. Rendered in watercolour and integrated into aesthetically pleasing compositions coupled with verse, these images subscribe to the visual culture of aesthetic science in their mixture of meticulous observation, romantic convention, and atmospheric staging. Inscribed in a decorative roundel composed of plant and insect specimens that appear to melodiously float on the page yet serve the strategic purpose of

forming a recessed window into another world, the male and female Satin bower birds are depicted in accurate detail; the male denoted by his striking glossy blue-black plumage and pale bluish, white bill, the female displaying an olive-green back, brown wings, and a scalloping pattern on the breast (Figure 4).¹⁰ Unlike the standardised scientific notation accompanying the specimen pages, the underlying inscription is of a typical romantic variety, the role of which is to contribute to the sensual experience of the illustrated birds in their natural habitat rather than outline their taxonomic classification: “And blue-black Satin bird derides / Mirthful his sober russet brides! / Fern and tree-fern surround the whole / Each animate by a Fairy soul.”¹¹



Figure 4. “Hand drawn illustration from the Archer Family album,” Brisbane, ca. 1869, API-001-0001-0002, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

The composition illustrating the lyrebird displays a similarly affective inscription that reveals an experiential account of the specimen in a spiritually enhanced environment. Furthermore, the figure, with its extraordinary plumage of neutral-coloured tail feathers, is more visually integrated into an illusionistic cross-section of a bush landscape that resembles the artificial setting of a museum diorama.¹² Such capsule environments were created to enhance and dramatise the viewer’s experience of the specimen in its natural locale and are reminiscent, in their unique combination of romantic and scientific vision, of a number of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, most notably Sir John Everett Millais’ *Ophelia* of 1852 (Hemstedt 64). As staged constructions built to appeal to the senses, they attempt to recreate the powerful experience of being fully ensconced in nature.

This romantic encounter, based on a multi-sensory interaction with nature, was catered to through the rise of botanical gardens that functioned as open-air museums where the public could commune with the natural world as a socially sanctioned pastime. As early as 1792, the convict artist Thomas Watling described Australia as a “luxuriant museum” where “birds, flowers, shrubs and plants... are ringed with hues that might baffle the happiest effect of the pencil” (Smith 11). The Archer album contains a number of photographs of the Brisbane Botanical Gardens, attesting to the family’s interest in such natural pursuits (17). Moreover, it features a photo-collage depicting a strange and whimsical union, in which portraits of the Archers’ social circle have been directly inscribed upon the face of nature, an image that perfectly captures the essence of a public subsumed in the pleasures of aesthetic science, centred upon the joyful reverie of nature (24, Figure 5).



Figure 5. “Hand drawn leaves and a butterfly, each with portrait inserts,” Brisbane, ca. 1867, Archer family album, API-001-0001-0012, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

COLONIAL COLLAGE

Within the visual culture that developed around popular natural history, collage provided an adaptable model not only for the representation of aesthetic science, but also for the representation of the sensory experience it promoted. The act of engaging with a variety of disparate materials, of handling, cutting, pasting, and reworking them into novel arrangements evoked a direction communion with materiality that was akin to the practice of aesthetic science.¹³ When these materials included natural specimens or representations thereof, collage enabled the creation of a virtual landscape where the

featured specimens served not only as specific examples of captured nature, but also stood metonymically for a more comprehensive natural world interpreted through the filter of personal experience. In this sense, collage provided a new form of conscious, experimental representation in which the creative hand of the artist-collector was just as important as the scientific accuracy of the collected specimen (de Zegher 79).

Within a colonial context, however, the employment of collage as an agent of aestheticisation takes on an extended meaning: not only does it represent an appropriation and self-conscious construction of the material environment but it also subscribes to the colonising impulses of possession and subjugation. In terms of its technical approach, collage mirrors the colonial process; the decontextualisation, appropriation, and reconfiguration of various elements resembles an imperial trajectory consisting of the assumed control and manipulation of an ‘Other.’¹⁴ In this light, the application of collage within the Archer album as a means of aestheticising the Australian landscape can be viewed as an act of domestication.

This process of domestication through aestheticisation often centred upon an imperial trajectory of capture and possession. To this effect, Griffiths has shown that albums from the period were sometimes called ‘bags,’ referring to the photographic ‘shots’ contained inside (289). Within the Archer family album, this dynamic is most visible in the pages devoted to indigenous culture. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully analyse its complex and varied representation within colonial album imagery, it is clear that no single dominant tendency exists. Rather, representations are as diverse and as nuanced as the album-compilers’ own reactions to cultural contact. Furthermore, it must be remembered that indigenous material culture was not formally separated from natural history collections until the 1870s, and this mixed classificatory scheme is predominantly reflected in albums and museums of the period.¹⁵

Featuring a combination of drawings with cut-out photographs and chromolithographs, the Archer family album contains a number of collage compositions devoted to indigenous culture, one of the most prominent of which is a portrait of “King Tidy of Brisbane” (35). This representation, which features a hand-embellished photographic portrait of King Tidy surrounded by additional photographs and watercolour paintings of indigenous figures set within a token bush setting, is based on a series of artificial constructions: the subjects have been removed from their original contexts and have been arranged in aesthetic juxtaposition with an emphasis on theatrical display. As a combination of disparate images, this compilation disallows any coherent reading and instead transforms the work into a flattened, decorative stage-like setting.

While it is documented that David Archer set the family pattern of allowing Aborigines to use Archer land for traditional purposes and therefore experienced fewer difficulties with local tribes than many other pioneers, this image suggests that the family still viewed indigenous culture through an imperial lens as is evident in the presence of an “Advance Australia” banner beneath the portrait of King Tidy (*Making Do* 3). Furthermore, the liberal application of brightly coloured hand-painted embellishments can be read as an act of subjugation in that it functions as a destabilisation device,

undermining the image's authorship and obscuring its reading. In this sense, the over-painting serves to disrupt the inherent integrity of the photographs, the subjects of which already appear contested in their apparent staging. Within these images, the act of aestheticisation almost becomes a brutal imposition. The garish colours not only clash with the grisaille palette of the photographs in a distracting manner but also are entirely incongruous in their application to the depicted scenes. The addition of polychromatic flourishes to a number of the subjects contests their sombre demeanours while undermining the solemnity of the scene at large. Through strategic embellishment the figures have literally been written over and hence written off, transformed like the natural specimens around them into ornamental symbols of the colonies (Neville 53).

The treatment of indigenous weapons and tools within the composition also subscribes to a trajectory of domestication through aestheticisation. Decontextualised and reconfigured into decorative collage-like arrangements, the depicted implements have lost their authenticity and potency. A similar display strategy is employed in the Remark Book of Tom Chanter, possibly compiled by a midshipman on board the H.M.S. Herald during a voyage to the South Seas from 1852 to 1860, which contains a collage of paper cut-outs of ink-drawn weapons and tools labelled "Australian Machines."¹⁶ As in the Archer album, the composition represents a form of subjugation through appropriation; by arranging the implements in an aesthetically pleasing manner, the artist has removed any threatening aspect and has stripped them of their power.



Figure 6. "Private collection of South Sea Islander artefacts," North Queensland, ca. 1885, API-071-0001-0012, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

Such aesthetic juxtaposition existed off the page as well. Examples can be found in private collections from the period as in the above photograph of a veranda display of

South Sea Islander artefacts from an anonymous North Queensland album which features a decorative installation of textiles, spears, feathers, and headdresses.¹⁷ Transformed through assemblage into highly possessable artefacts of human construction that played upon the residual role of curiosity to incite wonder and inspire rational enlightenment, such collected forms of indigenous material culture functioned as decorative devices that visually communicated the progress of Empire. As a visual trope, this display technique was also prevalent in contemporary public exhibition practice where it infiltrated the installation schemes employed at museums and Mechanics' Institutes, perhaps culminating in the 'Ethnographic Court' at the Garden Palace in 1879.

THE POLITICS OF WONDER

Within these various realms of private and public display, the complex relationship between collection and control was realised through a purposeful, constructed form of exhibition that relied upon the appropriation and re-arrangement of natural and material culture into a form of ornamental exotica. As assembled collections, the album and cabinet simultaneously signified an act of distancing through the segregation and elevation of their displayed items, and an effort to collapse this distance through possession and sensory connection. Ultimately, this ambiguous process mirrored the uncertainty, ambivalence, and instability of the colonial encounter at large.

Nevertheless, on a foundational level, both the album and cabinet represented an attempt to engage with difference; adhering to a centuries-old visual code of display, they subscribed to a tradition in which aesthetics and wonder were elevated above veracity and context, which were often steeped in the uncomfortable act of dispossession (Greenblatt). Described in the fifteenth century by Albertus Magnus as "a systole in the heart," wonder was an intensely appealing interior emotion that found its purest manifestation within the cabinet of curiosities, where it was aroused through strategic display hinging upon the affective properties of juxtaposition (Weschler 78-9).

In the mid-nineteenth century, this tradition was reinvigorated in the culture of popular natural history which revitalised the visual ideology of the cabinet to create provocative sensory representations of the material world. This constructed form of display became more relevant as the colonial period progressed, acting as buffer against the waning curiosity of an increasingly educated British and settler population that was fast becoming familiarised with foreign landscapes and cultures (Neville 17). As a strategic device, it was employed as an attempt to preserve the wondrous impact of contact with the new through the creation of progressively intricate spectacle.

The album, as a metaphorical cabinet, represented one of the most ubiquitous and popular repositories for this form of aesthetic display. However, unlike its Renaissance predecessor, it favoured the genteel connotations and popular sensory appeal of wonder within the romantic culture of aesthetic science over its association with the historical tradition of intellectual curiosity. Moreover, it no longer subscribed to an absolutist form of divine wonder, but revealed a tempered form of engagement with nature and the 'Other' that was intimately connected to the imperial initiative of Science and Culture, and the direct negotiation of this imperative on a personal level.

Within the Archer family album, this form of engagement was expressed as a self-reflexive exercise in cultural refinement. Through arrangement and aestheticisation, the appropriation of antipodean natural and material culture was translated into a testament of skill and status where the items on display were valued less for their essential character and more for their associative power and decorative potential within a complex cultural network of taste. This tactical form of display was particularly important in a socially unstable colonial setting where civility was a necessary artificial construction that required deliberate exhibition. Employing wonder as an effective and culturally sanctioned aesthetic medium, the Archer family album presents a sensory spectacle of curated nature and culture that not only highlights the artificiality and theatricality that defined the colonial experience but also reveals an intriguing example of the modern compulsion to self-fashion through the manipulation of materiality.

Notes

¹ Phillip Parker King. *Narrative of a Survey of the Intertropical Waters and Western Coasts of Australia. Performed between the years 1818-1822*, vol. 2; as quoted in Moyal.

² I am employing the term 'cabinet' in its traditional sense in which it was used interchangeably to describe both a collector's chest and a designated room or space devoted to a collection of curiosities. For more on the Macleay collection, consult Stanbury and Holland.

³ One of the earliest modern inceptions of the album was the *album amicorum*, or 'book of friends,' a prototype of the autograph book devoted to collecting signatures and inscriptions popularised amongst university students in sixteenth-century Germany.

⁴ Patrizia di Bello gives an overview of the history and socio-cultural context of the nineteenth-century album in *Women's Albums*.

⁵ It must be noted that despite such visual and structural similarities, significant ideological differences exist between the album and cabinet. Primarily, the cabinet was exclusive and autocratic while the album was collaborative and democratic. Secondly, unlike the cabinet which was principally devoted to representing manmade and Godly wonders, albums commonly contained a category of sentimental and diaristic material.

⁶ Geoffrey Batchen has explored the album's structure in terms of its compositional and narrative freedom, while Patrizia di Bello and Vicky Mills have contrasted the taxonomic structure of the album with that of the nineteenth-century museum (Batchen 49, di Bello 7, Mills 3).

⁷ By collage, I mean both the literal definition of an artistic composition made of various materials glued onto a surface, as well as a broader application of the term that includes multi-dimensional creative works such as the album and cabinet that resemble collage in their incorporation of diverse materials and components.

⁸ Archer family album, 1865-1874, 340 x 260 x 50mm., John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. For a summary of the Archer family history, consult *Making Do*.

⁹ Miss Eliza Younghusband Album, 1856-1865, South Australia, National Library of Australia.

¹⁰ Interestingly, the Macquarie Collector's Chest also contains a Satin bowerbird specimen.

¹¹ The combination of scientific and romantic texts within the album underlines the precepts of aesthetic science, just as a combination of scientific and spectacular display strategies, including text or the lack thereof, contributed to the unique aesthetic experience of the cabinet.

¹² While the introduction of museum dioramas in British and colonial culture did not take place until the end of the nineteenth century and did not become firmly established as standard museum practice until the twentieth century, I would argue that the representation of aesthetic science within album imagery foreshadowed this movement.

¹³ As an aesthetic trend, nature collage has been largely ignored in academic discourse yet is worthy of study in that it represents an intriguing manifestation of cultural digestion at the vernacular level. One notable exception is the work of David Elliston Allen. For an overview, see his “Tastes and Crazes.”

¹⁴ Moreover, as a composite creation composed of diverse materials that resist integration, collage metaphorically alludes to the mosaic and disjunctive nature of colonial culture.

¹⁵ According to the Annual Report of the Australian Museum in 1858:

The existing building contains only one room fitted for the exhibition of specimens of Natural History. Into this space are crowded animals, birds, reptiles, fishes, a large collection of insects, crustacea, shells and geological specimens; also a variety of ethnographical objects, illustrative of the history of the Aborigines of Australia and of the Polynesian Archipelago... (Dorward 101)

¹⁶ Remark Book of Tom Chanter, ca. 1852-60, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

¹⁷ Such private forms of display are examined by Tom Griffiths, particularly in his study of the collector Reynell Eveleigh Johns (1834-1910), who set up a small museum in his sitting room (47).

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