

J. LEMAITRE

WONDERS
are
COLLECTIBLE

TAXIDERMY

TRANQUIL BEAUTY

LANNOO





Pheasant by Darwin, Sinke & van Tongeren
is now part of the Murderme Collection
for which Damien Hirst recently opened
a museum in London.



PREFACE

Three years ago, taxidermy was only a small, magical sparkle in my head. Nowadays, my passion has developed into a modest, yet very cosy, taxidermy workshop in the centre of Leuven. A cabinet of curiosities where every animal or object tells a mythical story. It is a pleasure to show people my enchanting world and to share my amazement with them.

It is hard to believe that the magic that ran through my head at that time has become something very concrete. It is a journey that still gives me a lot of pleasure and satisfaction. I am very grateful to have met so many fascinating people along the way. Without them, I would never have come as far as I have. It is absolutely fantastic now to be able to transfigure this touch of magic in my own book. Wonders never cease and moreover, they are collectible.

For me, taxidermy is a counter reaction to the fast-paced society we live in. Every stuffed animal is a symbol of an era that slips by without leaving us any grip on it. I try to make time stand still through my creations while simultaneously create a sense of awe and wonder that reaches beyond the present day. By adding minor touches to these creatures, I detach them from reality so that people can interpret them in their own way and let their imagination run wild. My creations are wonders that hopefully fill a special place in people's homes. It is the beauty of nature that continues to inspire me in this profession.

I especially want to dedicate *Wonders are Collectible* to Mieke Vanlommel, a dear person who left this world far too soon. Wherever you may be, I cherish the moments that we had together and I often comfort myself with these memories.

Life is short, far too short. Do what you want to do, dream and make some of your dreams come true. It will make life so much more meaningful...

Jeroen Lemaitre

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Leroy de Barde Alexandre Isidore (1777-1828),
Réunion d'oiseaux étrangers, aquarelle.



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Darwin, Sinke & van Tongeren, *Blue-fronted Amazon*, 2015.

>

Melchior d'Hondecoeter, *A pelican and other birds near a pool, known as the Floating Feather*,
oil painting on canvas, 159 × 144 cm, 1680.



Kapellen.

Eerste plaat. Dagskapellen.



De Irievlinder (*Apatura iris*).



De groote Schorslapper (*Vanessa polychloros*).



De groote Parelsluierkapel (*Argynnis aglaia*).



De Citroenkapel (*Collias*).



De Paauwvogelvlinder (*Vanessa io*).



De Glaskapel (*Gloria*).



De Populierkapel (*Limenitis populi*).



De Inzigg-vskapel (*Tachyporus heros*).



De Nymfkapel (*Vanessa atalanta*).



Het Witje (*Pieris brassicae*).



De Zelevlinder (*Almaeus podalirius*).



De Aurorenkapel (*Pontia cardamines*).



De Apollovlinder (*Doris apollo*).



De Hantsman (*Tachyporus aristochia*).



De Zandvogelvlinder (*Tachyporus janira*).



De Koningvontel (*Vanessa antiope*).



De Dottedkapel (*Tachyporus celsus*).



De Zebra-vontel (*Papilio machaon*).

Mancheur prenten.

Nr. 123.

Koninklijke Hof- en Universiteits-Boekdrukkerij van Dr. G. Wolf Raemaekers - Munchen.

Gegeven door H. van der Meulen te Gollum.

Kapellen.

Tweede plaat. Nachtkapellen.

124



De Denempijlstaart (*Sphinx Funaria*).



De Taalkapel (*Aglaia Tau*).



De Lijnspeijlstaart (*Sphinx Egeata*).



De kleine Druivenlekker (*Dolophila perodius*).



De Boeckapel (*Euxoa Caja*).



De Russische Boeckapel (*Euxoa leza*).



[De nachtspanner (*Macroglossa ocellatarum*).



De Lindenvlinder (*Sphinx lilae*).



De Canselruispeijlstaart (*Sphinx Canselvul*).



De Donschoudevlinder (*Acherontia atropis*).



Het Nachtspannerwong (*Stenocla pyri*).



Het kleine wonschild (*Cateana fraxini*).



De Glandsvlinder (*Dolophila neri*).



De Walruspeijlstaart (*Sphinx usphorise*).



De Druivenlekker (*Dolophila Geberis*).



Het Waldmannotje (*Sphinx Gull*).



De Druispeijlstaart (*Sphinx lipophanes*).



Het avondspannerwong (*Sphinx vestita*).



Het rode wonschild (*Cateana rupea*).



De Populiersvlinder (*Sphinx populi*).

Hansener prenten.

Nr. 124.

Koninklijke Hof- en Universiteits-Buchdrukkerij van Dr. C. Wolff & zoon te München.

Uitgegeven door H. van der Meulen te Gollies.



Taxidermist working on wolf teeth, one of the various behind-the-scenes shots taken for the February 1935 edition of *Weekly Illustrated*.

TAXIDERMY THROUGH THE EYES OF

THE TAXIDERMIST

THE STUFFED THAT DREAMS
ARE MADE OF

*About suspended crocodiles, arsenic poisoning
and grieving robins*

—
*'I do remember an apothecary
And in his needy shop a tortoise hung,
An alligator stuff'd, and other skins
Of ill-shaped fishes'*

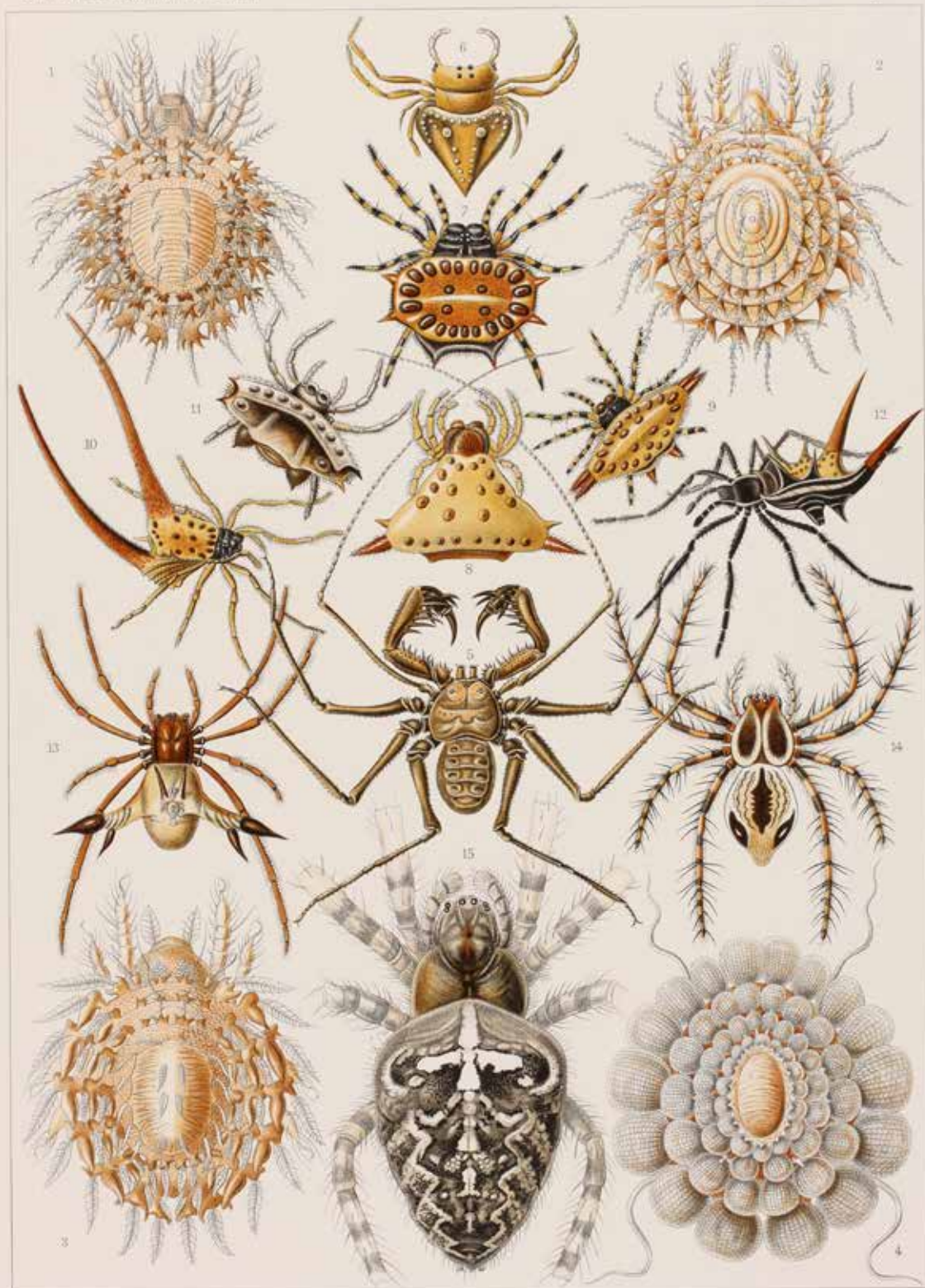
Shakespeare, *Romeo & Juliet*, circa 1597

—
What was Shakespeare's connection to taxidermy? Why did he send Romeo to a pharmacy filled with preserved animals? And why did Hitchcock use the taxidermy theme in his movies? Why does Damien Hirst consider a shark preserved in a tank of formalin a work of art? Why has stuffed animal life become so prevalent in interior designs, magazines, shops, shop-windows, video clips, trend blogs and fashion shows? Almost five centuries have passed since Shakespeare. In that time, taxidermy, as a profession, has greatly evolved and so has the way we deal with nature; both are inextricably connected. In the last 500 years, mankind has discovered, explored, dominated and endangered nature. The story of taxidermy is the story of the marriage between mankind and animals, in good times and in bad.





With a collection of thousands of insects, drawers full of shells and 400 glass jars with animals preserved in alcohol, Albertus Seba (1665-1736) was one of the most important collectors in his time.



Arachnida. — Spinnentiere.

THE NUMBER OF THE BEASTS

*About zoological messes, natural department stores
and Christian pelicans*

—
*‘The case of the fighting tigers
may perhaps be considered
somewhat sensational and out of place
as a museum object.’*

Montagu Browne, 1870

—
Collectors usually buy stuffed animals for aesthetic reasons: they want to decorate their homes or to expand their collection. They are amateurs in the positive sense of the word: passionate admirers. Until the late 18th century, beauty, amazement and social status were the three most important trump cards of the classic *Kunstkammer*. Collectors wanted to impress the viewers of their collections. They were applauded for their heterogeneous mishmash of expensively purchased curiosities. Scientists did not share the enthusiasm and amazement of the first *Kunstkammer* owners because their collections usually had little to do with science. Collectors sometimes jeered at the truth in exchange for bold stories about their collections. This was not considered objective, let alone scientific. For instance, the first collectors fabricated a story that adult pelicans fed their chicks their own flesh and blood. According to them, that was the purpose of the large beak. A scientifically unfounded falsity, yet with a religious explanation: the pelican was considered a symbol of Christ; it sacrificed its body and blood for its followers.

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Structure, objectivity and comprehensiveness were the driving forces behind the scientists in depicting the world of fauna and flora, also in the case of Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919).



Darwin, Sinke & van Tongeren, *Specimen*.





POST-NATURAL MAGIC

*About beetles with a GPS, penguin peacocks
and spoonbills in a bath*

—
*‘Animals fascinate me,
because you can find a force,
an energy, a fear that
also exists in sex.’*

Alexander McQueen, *L’Officiel*, February 2010

—
Why are artists so fascinated with taxidermy? Is it the voyeuristic confrontation with death? The deadly realism of the animals? The idea that you can freeze time or mortality? The lethal cocktail of death, beauty and vanity? The opportunity to observe an animal from up close, more than is ever possible in real life? Or is it the human drive for immortality embodied in an animal?

These existential questions fascinate many contemporary artists who are preoccupied with taxidermy. What differentiates them from real taxidermists is that they turn stuffed animals into subjects, not objects. They use taxidermy in their artwork to say something about the era in which we live. To achieve this, they often dig into the history of the metier. Through their contemporary art, they refer to techniques, traditions or historic examples of taxidermy, such as anthropomorphic taxidermy in which animals carry out human actions. Other artists are more fascinated by disfigured animals or animals in formalin, while some translate the human penchant for hunting trophies into art.

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Darwin, Sinke & van Tongeren,
Unknown Pose by Roseate Spoonbill, 160 x 160 cm.



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Image editing: Beatrice De Keyzer & Jeroen Lemaitre

Translation: Bracha De Man

Graphic design & typesetting: Bart Luijten

Cover image: Ernst Haeckel, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt,
photo Wolfgang Fuhrmannek

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© Lannoo Publishers, Tielt, 2016

ISBN 978 94 014 3465 2

D/2016/45/93 - NUR 454/640/656

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