

SIGHTS ON THE
NATURAL SCIENCES

IM VISIER DER KUNST



Diepische, Terschingsarten
Stk. Anzahl, Nummer: 1
Kunstmuseum (Naturhistor.)
Hamburg, 2003



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SAY
IT
ISN'T
SO



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BRIAN COLLIER
MARK DION
GALERIE FÜR
LANDSCHAFTSKUNST
HENRIK HÅKANSSON
FRANK HESSE
CARSTEN HÖLLER
JOHN ISAACS
CHRISTOPH KELLER
SZABOLCS KISSPÁL
GERHARD LANG
M+M



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CARSTEN NICOLAI
OLAF NICOLAI
NANA PETZET
THEDA RADTKE
TYNE CLAUDIA
POLLMANN
HANNES RICKLI
HINRICH SACHS
CONRAD SHAWCROSS
HERWIG TURK /
GÜNTER STÖGER
JUDITH WALGENBACH



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SPECIAL GUESTS
MARCEL DUCHAMP
NIKOLAUS LANG
BRUCE NAUMAN



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III.

Nikolaus Lang, and with him herman de vries,¹³ Michael Badura,¹⁴ and several other artists, can be called into play as pioneers of an understanding of art stemming from the 1970s that younger artists such as Mark Dion, Theda Rathke, and Brian Collier represent. At first glance, the latter even appear to be unshakably continuing in the new millennium what some artists in the 1970s brought into the discussion and thus into art history. The approach practiced by Collier,¹⁵ born in 1970 in Bay Shore, New York, in particular appears to seamlessly connect up to Lang's work in the 1970s. His investigations of the flora and fauna in orange groves (*Orange Grove Project*), his collection of rocks (*Rock Collecting Project*), his presentation of eighty-one earth samples in Plexiglas cubes measuring one inch (*81 Cubic Inches*) assume the shapes of tested archival ordering and presentation and allow making conclusions about the composition of the investigated and evaluated area of a natural or cultural landscape. Yet on closer examination, for instance of the "Collier Classification System," extraordinarily differentiated instructions for collecting and classifying "very small objects," it becomes clear that this artist not only employs certain methods in order to arrive at a concrete result, but that it is these scientific methods themselves that are being opened up to question. The understanding of classifying science becomes both the issue and the object on display!

Like Lang, Collier has an extremely practice-oriented approach: he is also always concerned with "doing," i.e., with dealing with things and with their subsequent classification and presentation. But Collier circumvents the relationship between artist and viewer intrinsic in the museum by turning anyone interested into a potential participant, and if he or she becomes involved, then he turns them into real participants. For this purpose, he offers the official "Collier Classification System Collecting Kit," which one can order via e-mail.¹⁶ It includes a pair of tweezers, several small, sealable plastic bags, a pen, and adhesive labels.

Again, like Lang, Collier's treatment of things is analyzed down to its methodological foundations, that have evolved over history, and put on display. In doing so, he refers to no less a person than to the naturalists John Ray (1627–1705), Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788), and Karl von Linné (1707–1778). It was above all the latter who developed a universal system for the classification, designation, and specification of natural phenomena into genera and species, which forms the basis of today's natural scientific classification system. In his collection of "very small objects," Collier even succeeds in devising new systematic nomenclatures for everyday objects that up to now have existed above and beyond any precise classification, and have been completely ignored. He proceeds in a strictly scientific and matter-of-fact manner, enabling the classification of the smallest of objects and verging on the boundary to inefficiency, even absurdity.

¹³ *herman de vries: Natural relations; Eine Skizze*, ed. Karl Ernst Osthaus, annotated catalogue of the collection, Museum Hagen (Nuremberg, 1989); Peter Friese, *herman de vries: gute hoffnung/ohne gegensätze*, exh. cat. Kunstverein Ruhr, Essen (Essen, 1993), pp. 3–27.

¹⁴ Michael Fehr, ed., *Michael Badura: Werke bis 1991* (Nuremberg, 1991).

¹⁵ <http://briandcollier.com/>.

¹⁶ verysmallobjects@netscape.net.

Collier consciously takes up the understanding of science from the eighteenth century and of course the forms of its research practice. Like in a Spitzweg idyll, he may make his way into his area of research/his habitat wielding a pair of tweezers, wearing weather-proof clothing, and equipped with a specimen container, plastic bags, a map, and a notepad; yet this behavior and the way it manifests itself is a part of artistic work that requires being reflected on. It is not only the object on exhibit that is interesting, but along with it the entire context of the collection, the methods associated with its coming about, and the conditions that made it possible in the first place. This also includes the taxonomy created by Collier in the spirit of Linné—the classification into genera and species together with names that time and again cause us to smile.

IV.

As early as the end of the 1960s, Bruce Nauman's art already clearly distinguished itself from purely aesthetic production, and he had also begun to break with the radical concepts of Minimal Art that prevailed at the time.¹⁷ His *Concrete Tape Recorder Piece* from 1969, a concrete block which contains a tape recorder playing a tape loop of a woman screaming (inaudible because of the thick concrete layer), challenges the viewer to become involved with a solid, closed form; to, so to speak, think oneself into it; and to imagine something that has been robbed of direct, assuring perception. As the idea grows, so does the doubt whether there is even a recording of a scream (e.g., of someone being tortured) inside the block at all. What we are dealing with here is, as it were, an experimental situation that clearly opposes Stella's concept of "what you see is what you see,"¹⁸ as this work makes demands on our power of imagination, requires us to project our thoughts and feelings into it, which to this day lends the work validity within the scope of media-critical and political points of reference. It is the openness of what on the outside is an otherwise so closed work; the possibility of having unforeseeable experiences with oneself and with art; the opportunity of beginning to be able to think beyond oneself and one's perceptions that places Nauman's position in the vicinity of an "experimental system as a system of perception" (Boulboulé).

In his early space and corridor works,¹⁹ Bruce Nauman is concerned with creating precise architectural specifications for what with respect to their effect

¹⁷ Peter Friese, "Ah, Donald Judd, my favorite! Kunst über Kunst: Oder welchen Einfluss hat die Minimal Art?," in *Minimal Maximal, die Minimal Art und ihr Einfluss auf die internationale Kunst der 90er Jahre*, exh. cat. Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen (Bremen, 1998), pp. 48 and 184.

¹⁸ Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," *Art News* 65, no. 5 (September 1960), pp. 55–61.

¹⁹ What is meant are *Performance Corridor*, 1969 (New York); *Nicolas Wilder Corridor Installation*, 1971 (Los Angeles); *Corridor with Mirror and White Lights: Corridor with Reflected Image*, 1971



Diese Ausrüstung enthält eine Pinzette zum Sammeln, mehrere verschließbare Plastiktütchen zum Unterbringen der Objekte, einen Stift zum Notieren und Beschreiben und Aufkleber zur Kennzeichnung der durchsichtigen Behältnisse.

Anders als bei Lang wird dieser Umgang mit den Dingen auf seine methodischen, historisch gewachsenen Grundlagen hin analysiert und mit zur Darstellung gebracht. Collier beruft sich dabei auf keine geringeren als die Naturforscher John Ray (1627 – 1705), Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707 – 1788) und Carl von Linné (1707 – 1778). Vor allem letzterer hat die Schaffung universeller Systeme der Zuordnung, Benennung und Spezifizierung von Naturphänomenen in Arten und Unterarten entwickelt, wie sie in leicht abgewandelter Form bei den Naturwissenschaften noch heute Anwendung finden. In der Sammlung „sehr kleiner Objekte“ schafft es Collier sogar, neue systematische Nomenklaturen für solche Gegenstände des Alltags zu entwerfen, die bislang vollkommen unbeachtet (also einfach für sich und ohne System!) jenseits jeder genaueren Zuordnung existierten. Er geht streng wissenschaftlich und seriös vor, wenn er in seiner Arbeit die Klassifizierung der kleinsten Gegenstände bis an die Grenze der Ineffizienz, ja Absurdität hin ermöglicht.

Collier knüpft bewusst an das Wissenschaftsverständnis des 18. Jahrhunderts an und natürlich an die Ausformungen seiner forschenden Praxis. Zwar begibt er sich (wie in einer Spitzwegidylle) mit Pinzette, Botanisiertrommel, wetterfester Kleidung, Plastikbeutel, Landkarte und Notizblock ausgestattet in seinen Forschungsbereich / sein Habitat, doch ist diese Verhaltensweise und ihre Ausformung ein zu reflektierender Bestandteil der künstlerischen Arbeit selbst. Nicht allein der ausgestellte Gegenstand ist hier von Interesse, sondern mit ihm der gesamte Kontext der Sammlung, die Methoden ihres Zustandekommens und die Bedingungen, die sie erst möglich gemacht haben. Hierzu gehört auch die von Collier im Linnéschen Sinne entworfene Taxonomie, die Ordnung in Gruppen und Untergruppen, verbunden mit den immer wieder zum Schmunzeln anregenden Namen.

IV.

Schon Ende der 1960er Jahre unterscheidet sich Bruce Naumans Kunst deutlich von einer rein ästhetischen Produktion und beginnt sich aber auch von den damals radikalen Konzepten der Minimal Art abzusetzen¹⁷. Sein *Concrete Tape*

¹⁷ Peter Friese, „Ah, Donald Judd, my favorite!“ Kunst über Kunst Oder welchen Einfluss hat die Minimal Art? In: *Minimal Maximal, die Minimal Art und ihr Einfluss auf die internationale Kunst der 90er Jahre*, Katalog Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen, 1998, S.48 und 184.

**BRIAN
COLLIER**

Using the Collier Classification System

Naming Very Small Objects with the Collier Classification System can be an interesting and rewarding experience. By following these simple instructions you can become a participant in the global effort to name and catalog these previously unclassified and ever-present things. With your help we can further the goal of maintaining order and control over a chaotic world filled with ever-increasing amounts of detritus. At this work station you'll find a printed classification chart, forceps, note pad, a pen or pencil, blank labels, and small glass vials. These items are all you will need to name your Very Small Object.

1.

First you should collect a Very Small Object to name. Very Small Objects can be found all around you. Simply reach into your pockets or look on the table or floor around you. If you need help in finding a Very Small Object you can refer to the "point of origin" section on the Classification Chart. This section gives many examples of where these objects can be found. On the wall next to these instructions you'll find definitions to help you determine the parameters of what exactly a Very Small Object is. Using the forceps, carefully pick up the object and place it in "maximum dimensions of a very small object" area on the work station table.

2.

Using the classification charts, proceed from A. through H. to construct your new name. The finished name should be three separate words, each one compiled from the name fragments provided in charts. If you find that the charts do not adequately describe your object you may add a description to one of the categories. When adding a description please write it on a page from the note pad and tack it to the small cork board mounted on the wall near the work stations. Descriptions work best when they are fragmented before insertion into the overall name. Review the classification charts to find examples of this practice. Additions will be included in the classification charts when they are periodically updated.

3.

After you finish constructing the name of your Very Small Object, you should write it on one of the provided labels with the black sharpie marker. Please print clearly.

4.

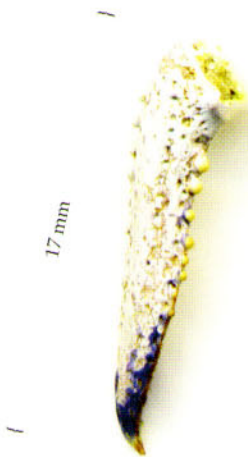
Using the forceps, carefully pick the Very Small Object up and place it in one of the glass vials. Screw the top on the glass vial. Peel the label off of its backing and stick in on the vial near the cap.

5. Now take the vial and place it in one of the empty holes in the panel labeled "Newly Classified Very Small Objects" mounted on the wall near the work station.

Thank you! You have just become a contributor to The Very Small Objects Master Collection.

Brian Collier





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