

WunderKammer – a series of magical objects to delight and amuse

The Objects

'WunderKammer' (literally Wonder Cabinets) is a series of objects both suspended and on stands, magical three dimensional distillations of ideas inspired by Angela Carter's writing (Nights At The Circus and The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman) with other tales and visions from my own imagination.

Each WunderKammer is a different eye-spy experience designed to engage the viewer's imagination one after the other in a miniature journey of illusion.

Both children and adults are invited to become part of each dream, a sharing round the spheres of the subconscious.

Description

The public approach each WunderKammer to discover the contents, they continue around the installed space at their own pace to discover the others, peering in to spy the magical scene encased within creating an intimacy with the subject. Each one is self-contained with, illumination, motors & sound system run by battery power and secured on a stand or suspended from a suitable fixing point. They can be in situ both day and night running continuously a few hours at a time, with a costumed 'guardian' in attendance at all times. In addition to the 'WunderKammer' a number of small sound activated 'Birdcages' can also be installed around the space.

The 'WunderKammer' can be situated in a variety of settings, in nooks around public buildings (e.g. arts centres, museums) bringing an intimate moment away from the clamour of the public space or outside perhaps in a public garden or a wooded area in a park where they can be discovered by the public, giving a heightened sense of displacement & wonder to the objects. As each WunderKammer has it's own sound track the space needs to be away from other noise, there are possibilities for adding site specific elements.

At the Garden of Delights, Manchester in June 2005 @2000 people visited the WunderKammer. It was accessible for 2 x 2 hours per day over three days. Following a site visit a quiet leafy space was chosen away from the hubbub of the festival where a broad audience enjoyed an 'intimate' experience. Many lingered to discuss their reactions and share their experiences with each other. Some were intrigued by the process others enchanted by the spell of the visual, returning at nightfall to experience it in a different dimension.

Further ideas for 'WunderKammer' continue to be developed using buoys, ballcocks, discarded metal boxes etc. banal objects transformed.

History

The prototypes were developed and created with R&D funding from ACE, London in July 2004 and were presented twice in public with positive feedback. The first showing in October 2004 was an outdoor setting in Chumleigh Gardens, Burgess Park, London; as twilight fell the audience were led along an atmospherically lantern lit path to discover two WunderKammer nestled under a leafy pagoda.

The second was an informal indoor gathering in December 2004 for a small number of invited guests at a private event. On both occasions the children and adults gave positive and constructive feedback commenting on how they were transfixed by both the sound, movement, and quirky design.

The premier of WunderKammer (produced with Arts Council Funding in 2005) was presented in Platt Fields Park at the Garden of Delights, Manchester – June 2005 to @2000 people over 3 days. An element of the series was re-worked for the 'Clock Works - Live Art in a shop window' series during the 2005 Brighton Festival.

The WunderKammer are inspired and informed by the tradition of fairground sideshows, Itinerant Peepshows or Raree Shows, pre-cinema technology (persistence of vision, zoetrope, praxinoscope, Flip Books), illusion of shadow, mirror, lens, light & movement and the desire to enchant and engage the imaginations of the public in a direct way in an accessible environment.

Future development

As well as touring the WunderKammer in their current existence I am looking for longer term Commissioning Partners with whom to develop more Wunderkammer and other projects site specifically.

Elements of the WunderKammer can also be presented and re-worked to suit a particular context.

Camden Council, Parks department in London have expressed an interest in temporary installations of WunderKammer in Camden Borough Parks during 2006.

I am keen to explore a variety of different settings to present this work that can transform an environment and enchant a broad public.

Other projects in early development stage are a travelling 'Hall of Mirrors' in truck – a lustrous distorting environment incorporating peepshows also a functioning 'While-u-wait' Camera with itinerant studio.

Installation

Technical demands on the venue are minimal as each WunderKammer is self contained and run by battery, a team of two can set up in one day with the possibility of opening the same evening. A costumed 'Guardian' is in attendance during the hours of presentation to attend to visitors and any technical malfunctions. Hours can be tailored to each venue. The venue will need to provide a steward to guard it during breaks. Half a day is required for the get-out.

Fees

The following fee structure is based on using existing WunderKammer, an additional fee for materials and creation time would need to be added for any specific commissions.

Daily rate for WunderKammer is @ £500 for one day then £350 each consecutive day + accommodation, food & transport from London (i.e. Van hire & petrol) for two people.

The examples shown in the following photos (left to right) are:

Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage a clear acrylic sphere carapace encasing a second more delicate sphere of white ostrich feathers which in turn contains a pair of bird's wings which rotate around a small light source which throws shadows onto it's cage of feathers.

Tiger's Lament - a 16" copper ballcock painted with fairground style tiger images on the exterior; peep through the spy hole and you see a spinning zoetrope of pacing tigers trapped on the inside incessantly pacing to a soundtrack of plaintive Lieder & growling tiger.

Shadow House peer through the goggles to discover a shadowy universe played out to a strange throaty soundtrack

Bird Woman – will she ever fly? the reflection of an animated winged woman viewed in rotating mirrors (Praxinoscope) to a cooing flapping soundtrack

Flicker – The public place their hands in the cage to animate a woman and tiger dancing together.

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