

Surreal Science: Loudon Collection with Salvatore Arancio

25 August 2018 – 6 January 2019

Gallery 7

Free Entry

#SurrealScience

28 June 2018 - This exhibition presents extraordinarily crafted objects from the Loudon Collection, selected and animated by visual artist **Salvatore Arancio** (b. 1974).

Fascinated by scientific breakthroughs from the Enlightenment to the 19th and early 20th centuries, **George Loudon** is a collector and patron who has amassed a renowned and unique collection of curious objects relating to the study and teaching of life sciences.

Made by skilled artisans, these objects range from beautifully illustrated books to handmade glass models of sea anemones, life-size papier-mâché botanical models, exquisite magic lantern slides and bisected human skulls. At the intersection of art and science, the objects were originally designed to capture the complex structures of nature. Over time, they have lost their pedagogical function and become open to contemporary reinterpretation.

The Whitechapel Gallery has invited the Italian-born artist Salvatore Arancio, who shares Loudon's interests in 19th and 20th century life sciences, to select and respond to the collection in an exhibition that stages the objects in dialogue with the artist's own works. New and unexpected narratives are created in an original installation that reflects both the extraordinary focus of the collection and the selector's own practice.

Fascinating, magical and exquisite objects on display range from a glass model of a Portuguese man o'war jellyfish (Germany, 19th century) to a boxed collection of seashells (India, 19th century). Magic lantern slides (France, 19th century) depict extinct animals whilst plaster anatomical models include a deconstructed male torso (France or Germany, 19th century) and two medical heads (Ireland, 19th century). They are shown alongside Japanese botanical illustrations (c.1878) and coral specimens (Europe, 19th century). The materials used include lost-wax casts, minerals, velvet, ivory and glass.

Arancio, who works in diverse media including ceramics, etching, collage, animation and video, shows new works building on the collection's wondrous nature. *The Fluorescent Host* (2018) is a 2m high ceramic sculpture which stands in the gallery like a timeless monolith. It plays with the scale of a small, ancient American obsidian hand axe (c. 6000 BC). Inspired by a book in the collection called *Soul Shapes* by Alice Murray Smith (1890), which imagines that souls can be categorised by colour and shape, a new film work *Dedicated to the Blue Soul* (2018) will combine narration from the text with found educational footage. Sounds from The Focus Group, a project by experimental electronic musician and graphic designer Julian House, will fill the space. They function as a soundtrack to Arancio's new film piece *Reactions in Plants and Animals* (2018) which depicts manipulated psychedelic images from a nature documentary.

Press Release

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In making the selection, Arancio and Loudon have moved away from museological display and drawn inspiration from the way Italian nobleman Ferdinando Cospi presented his collection in 16th century Bologna. Finds from the three kingdoms of nature (naturalia), artefacts of all kinds and origin (artificialia or mirabilia) and strange or curious objects (curious) were displayed together with the intent of bringing together in one place the complexity of all the world. The exhibition borrows partly from the aesthetics of this 'cabinet of nature', and references the Surrealists delight in juxtaposing unrelated objects.

Surreal Science shows the Loudon collection in a new light, and reveals the visual power of both the objects and Arancio's new work. It is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue by George Loudon, *Object Lessons* (2015).

Notes to Editors

- *Object Lessons: The Visualisation of Nineteenth-Century Life Sciences*, George Loudon, Ridinghouse, 2015
- The exhibition is curated by Iwona Blazwick and Candy Stobbs, Assistant Curator at the Whitechapel Gallery
- George Loudon is a Dutch collector and patron based in London. He has been a trustee of the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten and member of the Acquisition Committee of the Stedelijk Museum, both in Amsterdam. He has also been a trustee of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. In 1995 he was a judge of the Turner Prize
- Salvatore Arancio (b. 1974) graduated with an MA Fine Arts Photography from the Royal College of Art (UK) and taught at the London College of Communication. He has shown widely in the UK, Europe and the USA.
- Selected exhibitions include Villa Audi Mosaic Museum, Beirut, Lebanon (2018); Viva Arte Viva, 57th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy (2017); Oh Mexico! Kunsthalle Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland (2016); Fashioned to a Device Behind a Tree, Camden Arts Centre, London, UK (2015); Une Taxonomie des Sens et des Formes, Centre d'art contemporain La Halle des bouchers, Vienne, France (2015); Project 09: Salvatore Arancio, Contemporary Art Society, London, UK (2015); The First Humans, Pump House Gallery, London, UK (2015)
- The Focus Group is a project by London-based experimental electronic musician and graphic designer Julian House, who is also co-founder of the Ghost Box record label

Visitor Information

Admission: Free

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm; Thursdays, 11am – 9pm

Whitechapel Gallery, 77 – 82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

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