

---

Fall 10-2013

## The Collectors' Cabinet: Renaissance and Baroque Masterworks from the Arnold & Seena Davis Collection - Press Release

Mike Horyczun  
Fairfield University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/collectorscabinet-ephemera>

---

### Recommended Citation

Horyczun, Mike, "The Collectors' Cabinet: Renaissance and Baroque Masterworks from the Arnold & Seena Davis Collection - Press Release" (2013). *Collectors' Cabinet – Ephemera*. 7.  
<https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/collectorscabinet-ephemera/7>

This item has been accepted for inclusion in DigitalCommons@Fairfield by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It is brought to you by DigitalCommons@Fairfield with permission from the rights-holder(s) and is protected by copyright and/or related rights. **You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses, you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.** For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@fairfield.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@fairfield.edu).



Media Contact: Mike Horyczun, 203.254.4000, ext. 2647  
[mhoryczun@fairfield.edu](mailto:mhoryczun@fairfield.edu)

**New Exhibition!**  
**October 10, 2013 – January 10, 2014**  
*The Collectors' Cabinet: Renaissance and Baroque Masterworks*  
*from the Arnold & Seena Davis Collection*  
**Bellarmino Museum of Art, Fairfield University**

FAIRFIELD, Conn. (Sept. 30, 2013). Fairfield University's **Bellarmino Museum of Art** presents its newest exhibition, *The Collectors' Cabinet: Renaissance and Baroque Masterworks from the Arnold & Seena Davis Collection*, on view **October 10, 2013**, through **January 10, 2014**. This exhibition is drawn from the important private collection of Arnold and the late Seena Davis, which was more than sixty years in the making. It features thirty works by leading Flemish and Italian masters, their circles, and their followers in the years between 1500 and 1700. **An opening reception, free and open to the public, takes place on Thursday, October 10, 2013, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.** Exhibition sponsors are the National Endowment for the Humanities, Morris Media Group, and Whole Foods Market.

In the late Renaissance and Baroque periods in Europe, discerning burghers and aristocrats assembled encyclopedic collections of fine art objects, creating unique *kunstammern*, or "Cabinets of Arts." Arnold and Seena Davis, from Westchester Country, New York, followed in this rich tradition, acquiring unique and beautiful works with a discerning eye and a curious intellect. "The collector is someone who is devoted to the accumulation of a particular class of objects," said Dr. Jill Deupi, Fairfield University Director and Chief Curator of University Museums. "The collector, who often loves the quest as much as – if not more than – the conquest, is driven by zeal and curiosity. The collector is a person whose eyes, mind, and heart play equally critical roles in the creation of his or her own collection." Arnold Davis and his wife Seena spent nearly the whole of their married lives pursuing European masterworks and

assembling their remarkable collection. Seasoned travelers, they never missed an opportunity to visit not only the biggest auction houses but also small private vendors where they sought out “sleepers,” overlooked objects with tremendous potential. Their stately Westchester County home is a testament to their commitment: every room on their ground floor is hung floor to ceiling with paintings and drawings from the 15th–19th centuries. The art continues on the upper floor where, in the tradition of earlier collectors, the Davises mingled *exotica* from the natural world with cherished paintings and other fascinating man-made objects.

“Seeing so many marvelous paintings and works on paper installed amongst Renaissance majolica pieces, figurines from the antique and Medieval periods, prized volumes, as well as objects associated with Seena Davis’ own art-making and Arnold Davis’ earlier career as a violinist, endows them all with a sense of unity and completeness that is sometimes lacking in more austere museum settings,” said Dr. Deupi. “It was a privilege not only to be able to study these works in situ but also to create a special exhibition highlighting some of the Davises’ finest pieces. My objective throughout has been to introduce a wider audience to specific treasures from this particular ‘cabinet’ while preserving the aesthetic of the collectors who so lovingly selected them.”

The art museum as we know it today is a direct descendant of the so-called “Cabinet of Curiosities” that emerged in the Renaissance. Such collections were assembled by society’s cultural *élite* and featured wonders from both the natural and the man-made worlds, *naturalia* and *artificialia*, respectively. Displayed in purpose-built spaces and designed to inspire awe while facilitating learning, these *wunderkammern*, or “rooms of wonders,” were understood as microcosmic representations of the universe; their contents specifically installed to reveal hidden similarities and, by extrapolation, important clues to unraveling life’s mysteries. A typical cabinet might feature taxidermied reptiles, stuffed birds, and exotic shells, together with learned texts and treatises, it being understood that nature had as much to teach us as books. This deliberate conjunction of the exotic and the scholarly in such spaces speaks to this very specific conception of knowledge and its acquisition during the Renaissance, as well as to the humanists’ belief that a systematic study of the natural world would shed light on our own mortal existence.

In the 17th century, ongoing exploration around the globe and expanded trade networks only heightened this desire to “map” the world – and humanity’s place in it – with a view to better understanding them both. This in turn gave rise to new epistemologies, which were less concerned with hermeneutics and more focused on physical characteristics; a shift that impacted the way cabinets were installed. During the following century, the so-called Age of Reason, the thirst for ever greater taxonomic clarity favored collections that were less universal and more targeted, paving the way for discipline-specific museums in the 19th century, including those devoted exclusively to natural history and to the visual arts. Despite normative shifts, the objects in such collections continued to be prized not only for their inherently beautiful or fascinating qualities, but also for the insights they provided into the mysteries of the universe as well as the power of creation both divine and human. Along the way, the rituals and social practices associated with collecting developed and evolved, giving rise to a particular breed of individual: the “collector.”

A series of **Family Days**, sponsored by Morris Media Group, will take place during the run of this exhibition on select Saturdays from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. in the Bellarmine Museum. These events, which are free and open to the public, include: “Fun with Baroque Art” (**Oct. 12**); “Portraiture” (**Nov. 9**); and “Ruff and Cuffs: Costume and Culture in Renaissance Art” (**Dec. 14**). Museum galleries are open to the public between noon and 5 p.m. on these same Saturdays. In conjunction with the exhibition, Dr. Catherine Puglisi, Professor and Chair of the Department of Art History at Rutgers University, will deliver a lecture entitled “The Man of Sorrows” on **Nov. 11**. This talk, which will take place from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. in Fairfield University’s DiMenna-Nyselius Library (Multi-Media Room), is sponsored by the Robert Lehman Foundation and is open to the general public at no cost.

**The Bellarmine Museum of Art** is open Monday through Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and on select Saturdays. Admission is free. For more information, call the Bellarmine Museum of Art at (203) 254-4046, or visit [www.fairfield.edu/museum](http://www.fairfield.edu/museum). The Bellarmine Museum of Art is located in Bellarmine Hall on the campus of Fairfield University, 1073 North Benson Road in Fairfield, Connecticut.

*Fairfield University is a Jesuit University, rooted in one of the world's oldest intellectual and spiritual traditions. More than 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students from 36 states, 47 foreign countries, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are enrolled in the University's five schools. In the spirit of rigorous and sympathetic inquiry into all dimensions of human experience, Fairfield welcomes students from diverse backgrounds to share ideas and engage in open conversations. The University is located in the heart of a region where the future takes shape, on a stunning campus on the Connecticut coast just an hour from New York City.*

Vol. 46, #65