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Enterprising Craftsmanship and Exotic Encounters in Seventeenth-Century Kunstkasten

My project examines the multimedia art cabinets, or *kunstkasten*, that were produced in Antwerp, exported throughout Europe, and exchanged for exotic goods and materials in the seventeenth century. Although the basic form of the cabinet originated in southern Germany in the sixteenth century, it was not until their subsequent production in Antwerp that kunskasten became widely available on the open market. The increasingly diverse clientele for these cabinets stimulated the introduction of novel materials, styles, formats, and functions. Antwerp kunstkasten cut across a wide range of media and craft disciplines, incorporating the materials, techniques, and knowledge of painters, engravers, locksmiths, ebonists, glassmakers, and silversmiths, among others. In addition to doors, drawers, and lids featuring carved ivory, exotic woods, miniature oil paintings, metalwork, embroidery, and precious gemstones, the interiors of the cabinets contained interactive architectural spaces, such as secret storage compartments, trap doors, and mirrored perspectives that produced various optical effects. As self-contained, microcosmic collections, kunstkasten were repositories for artworks, precious objects, naturalia, and exotica, thereby reflecting the city of Antwerp's role as a storehouse for raw materials and goods from around the world. Their contents and novel design features served as sources of curiosity, study and entertainment. In addition, the cabinets' multimedia construction fostered collaboration and innovation among diverse artists and craftsmen, while their incorporation of pictorial programs that quoted from Netherlandish paintings, prints, and book illustrations promoted and widely disseminated local idioms.

Drawing on Michael Baxandall's concept of the "Period Eye," this interdisciplinary study examines *kunstkasten* through the lens of cultural, economic, social, and intellectual circumstances in seventeenth-century Antwerp and explores the relationship between this specific context and the materials, form, function, and perception of art cabinets. My project moves beyond scholarship that has generally viewed *kunstkasten* as static pieces of furniture or domestic ornament and reconsiders them as global objects, embedded in a matrix of material, commercial, and patronage networks that spanned Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas; as mobile objects, whose portability and interactive interior spaces elicited certain cognitive and physical reactions from beholders; and as dynamic sites of intersection between the pictorial and decorative arts, architecture, optics, mathematics, craft specializations, and luxury industries.

By situating *kunstkasten* within the broader material culture of early modern Antwerp and its international trade networks, I aim to shed new light on their production, consumption, and reception, both locally and abroad. My rethinking of the *kunstkast* starts with the individual object and extends to the global networks created by the cabinet industry. Thus, I investigate the craftsmen, merchants, dealers, connoisseurs, collectors, and naturalists who bought, sold, made, traded, and used them within three primary, and overlapping, spheres: the domestic interior, the urban metropolis, and the global market.