

Edward Gorey's Cabinet of Curiosities

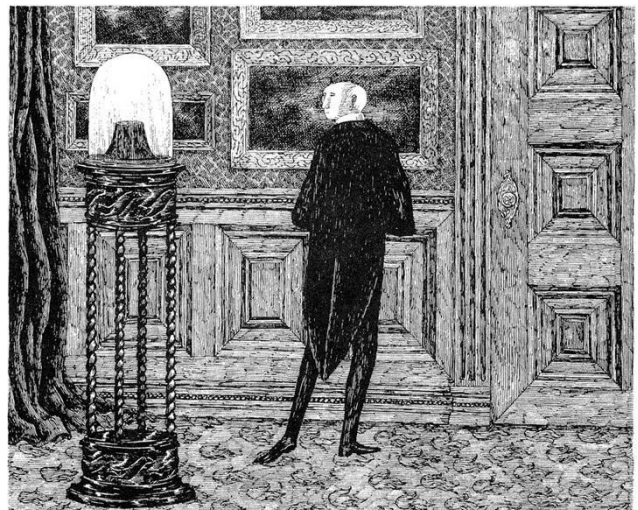
A fairly unscholarly stroll through the collections of Edward Gorey.

April 15 – December 31

The Edward Gorey House in Yarmouth Port opens up its 16th season on Saturday, April 15th with an exhibit of curiosities from the collection of writer/artist Edward Gorey. **Edward Gorey's Cabinet of Curiosities** is a Wunderkammer of objects and art that Gorey filled his Yarmouth Port House with—a wunderkammer being the 15th century pre-scientific predecessor of our modern day museum. All five gallery rooms of the Gorey House have been filled with a trove of objets d'art and objets d'oddy that, for some reason, Gorey felt deserved a place in his home. While some pieces in his collections made it into his illustration, it is safe to say that *all* of them

influenced him and maybe even fueled his imagination.

Gorey's collecting tendencies were eclectic but all of the objects had something in common: Gorey found them *interesting*—either because they were odd, or mundane or strangely both. Sometimes the sheer *act* of collecting and juxtaposing objects made them not only interesting but *important*. Hence, a display of salt & pepper shakers might suggest a lower Manhattan skyline, cheese graters become medieval armour when arranged in battle formation, tools and hardware resemble flocks of birds or schools of fish—if they are chasing something. An Albrecht Dürer etching, hung next to a yard sale acrylic portrait of someone's pet both elevates and diminishes the other.



As the party was about to retire for the night Fenks announced that the Lising Elbow was not in its case.

From lithographs to yard sale art, antiquities to roadside oddities; toys, rocks, tools, ceramics, tins and, of course—books, Gorey found almost *everything* interesting—if they possessed character, or a previous owner’s character, or the damage wrought by time. Whether



intentionally or not, Gorey was following the tradition of 15th Century European nobles and well-heeled scholars in recreating a Wunderkammer. A precursor to our idea of a modern day museum, a Wunderkammer (or Cabinet of Wonders, or a Cabinet of Curiosities) offered a wildly uncategorized selection of natural objects, antiquities, oddities, mechanical devices, texts—idiosyncratic representations of the known world at that time. Appearing in Italy and Germany in the late 1500s, the Wunderkammer spread across Europe, England, and even to the New World—lasting in one form or another well into the 19th century and beyond (as exemplified in

Barnum & Bailey traveling shows and carnival freak attractions). Gorey’s Wunderkammer is a peek through an ajar door into his worldview—found natural objects, materials in decay or softened by use. It is a selective representation to be sure (displaying even half of Gorey’s collections wouldn’t allow room for visitors) but it may offer a tiny insight into what fueled, stimulated and propelled Edward Gorey’s imagination.

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