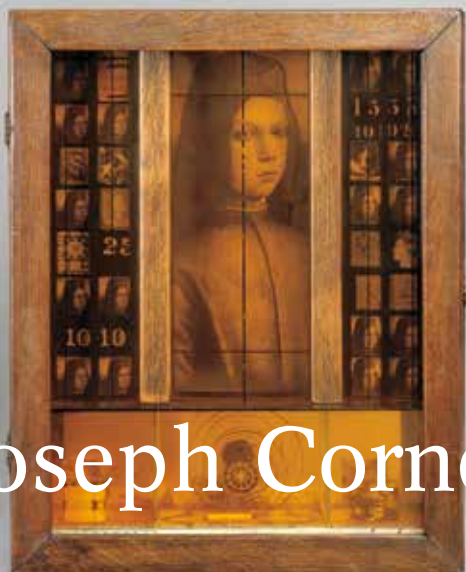


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KUNST  
HISTORISCHES  
MUSEUM  
WIEN

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Joseph Cornell

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20 OCTOBER 2015 TO 10 JANUARY 2016

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*»What kind of man is this, who, from old brown cardboard photographs collected in second-hand bookstores, has reconstructed the nineteenth century ›grand tour‹ of Europe for his mind's eye more vividly than those who took it, who was not born then and has never been abroad, who knows Vesuvius's look on a certain morning of AD 79, and of the cast-iron balconies of that hotel in Lucerne? How could he have made that work under the circumstances in which he did? This is a real miracle. His work forces you to use the word ›beautiful‹. What more do you want?«*

The artist Robert Motherwell on  
Joseph Cornell, New York, 1953

## INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

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Joseph Cornell was one of the most extraordinary artists of the twentieth century. This exhibition, which marks the first time that his work is presented in Austria, traces the full arc of his remarkable life and career. It presents many of his most important works from museums and private collections, including several that have travelled to Europe for the first time.

Born in 1903, Cornell could not draw, paint, or sculpt. He received no artistic education, he worked a string of blue-collar jobs to support his mother and disabled brother, and rarely travelled far from the family home in Flushing, New York. And yet, working at night on the kitchen table and in the cellar, he assembled one of the most remarkable and original bodies of work in recent memory. His collages, films, assemblages and shadowboxes have had a deep and lasting influence on generations of artists, from Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and Sol LeWitt to many still working today. But almost fifty years after his death in 1972 he remains little known outside the United States, in part due to the extreme fragility of his objects.

Cornell himself never once set foot outside his native country, and rarely ventured beyond New York City. And yet, his knowledge of the world was astounding. The exhibition

explores Cornell's relationship with the continent of Europe, his deep knowledge and understanding of its culture, history and geography, and his relationships with many of its key personalities from the fields of science, natural history, philosophy, astronomy, literature, ballet, opera, theatre, music, cinema and art. The exhibition's title is a nod to his restless imagination and ability to travel metaphorically through both time and place.

Presented within the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the works of Joseph Cornell enter into a fascinating dialogue with Renaissance paintings, the cabinet of coins and medals, and Egyptian burial keepsakes. But it is with the museum's *Kunstkammer* that this dialogue is most intense (a text about this relationship can be found later in this booklet). The final part of the exhibition can be found within the *Kunstkammer* itself, where a small group of Cornell's objects are on display. To further underline and explore this affinity, visitors can follow a special path through the *Kunstkammer*, pausing to look at historical objects from the museum's collection that have a special resonance with Cornell's own work.

The exhibition is curated by Jasper Sharp, together with Sarah Lea from the Royal Academy, London.

## BIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH CORNELL

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Joseph Cornell was born on 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1903, in Nyack, New York. He was the eldest of four children whose mother and father both came from socially prominent families of Dutch ancestry. His younger brother Robert suffered from cerebral palsy, and would be cared for by Joseph for the rest of his life. Cornell loved reading as a child, enjoying fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm, but showed little interest in art. In 1917, his father died of leukaemia and Cornell was enrolled at the prestigious Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. He was not academically inclined, and left school in 1921 without graduating. He found work as a door-to-door textile salesman in Manhattan. During his days walking through the city, he began to visit second-hand bookshops and antique shops, and to collect things that he found there. He also visited museums and developed an interest in theatre, cinema and ballet. In May 1929 his family moved to a street called Utopia Parkway in Queens, where Cornell, his mother and brother would remain for the rest of their lives.

Around 1931, following a visit to the Julien Levy Gallery, he began working at home on the family kitchen table and produced a series of small collages. Upon seeing them, Levy invited him to be part of a Surrealist group

exhibition and then, in 1932, to have his own debut solo exhibition at the gallery. Just a few years later he participated in the legendary exhibition »Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism« at MoMA. In 1940, he finally stopped working to focus on art full-time, and created a studio in his basement at home. Two years later, he exhibited alongside his friend Marcel Duchamp at Peggy Guggenheim's museum-gallery Art of This Century, designed by architect Frederick Kiesler.

He had exhibitions at the Charles Egan Gallery alongside Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline and Philip Guston, and later at the Stable Gallery, whose artists include Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly and Joan Mitchell. In the early 1960s Cornell began collaborating with avant-garde filmmakers, and received a stream of younger artists at his studio including Andy Warhol, Robert Indiana and James Rosenquist. In March 1965, his brother Robert died after contracting pneumonia, and the following year his mother also passed away. A few months later, Cornell's first major museum retrospective opened in Pasadena, California, soon followed by another at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Five days after his 69<sup>th</sup> birthday, on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1972, Cornell died at home of a suspected heart attack.

# 1

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UNTITLED

1930s  
Collage on paper  
Osaka City Museum of  
Modern Art

# 2

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UNTITLED

1930s  
Collage on paper  
New York, Daniel and  
Lauren Long, Courtesy  
James Corcoran Gallery,  
Los Angeles

These collages are characteristic of the first artworks that Cornell produced, during the 1930s. Working at night at the family kitchen table while his mother and brother slept, he would cut up and paste together reproductions of nineteenth-century engravings from Victorian novels, or illustrations from magazines of popular science and nature. He had a large supply of such materials, having begun to collect them several years earlier on his wanderings through Lower Manhattan's bookshops and antiquarian markets.

The collages reveal a lightness of touch and a sense of absurd humour. In one (object 2), an elegantly dressed man leans over a table, transfixed by a spinning coin. He wears on his head a colander, like a child who has raided the kitchen cupboard to dress up as a knight. Several arrows protrude from its holes, a sign, perhaps, that combat has already been waged. Another (object 1), recalls the celebrated 1869 line by the Comte de Lautréamont – »the chance meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table« – which was much loved by André Breton and the Surrealists. Here the umbrella has been replaced by a rosebud, a more romantic and sensual association.

In the mid-1930s, Cornell produced a group of sixteen individual collages, dedicated to the

# 3

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UNTITLED (STORY  
WITHOUT A NAME -  
FOR MAX ERNST)

1930s  
Collage on board  
Private collection

# 4

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UNTITLED

c. 1930  
Paperboard box with  
engraving  
London, The Mayor  
Gallery

German artist Max Ernst, whose work Cornell had come to know through the gallerist Julien Levy. In formal terms, they owe something to Ernst and his collage novels, employing similar changes of scale and pace in their Surrealist juxtapositions of unexpected objects and settings. But in terms of the content itself, they eschew the profanity and violence implicit in Ernst's often dark critiques of human nature in favour of a more playful and wondrous sequence of characters and situations. Many of them contain elements that will appear again later in Cornell's objects, from butterflies and balloons to stars, seashells, and young, curious protagonists. The storyboard tableau presented here (object 3) reproduces the original collages at a smaller scale using a Photostat machine, a tool that played an important role in Cornell's work. Cornell is thought to have produced a total of around 120 collages during the 1930s, a time when the medium was almost completely unknown within avant-garde circles in the United States. Seen together, they reveal his fascination with fictional narrative, image and word play, juxtaposition and motion.

## 5

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### UNTITLED (MINUTIAE OBJECTS)

c. early 1930s  
Cuboid paperboard  
box containing five  
cylindrical paperboard  
boxes, marbled paper,  
printed paper collage,  
balls, metal screws,  
glass  
Wassenaar, Caldic  
Collectie

As a Christian Scientist, Cornell avoided medicinal drugs, but this did not prevent him visiting C. O. Bigelow Chemists on Manhattan's Sixth Avenue, said to be America's oldest apothecary, to admire its glass display cases and shelves. Among the earliest assemblages that he made are the »Minutiae Objects«, made from commercially manufactured pill boxes. He went on to produce a number of similar objects until around 1940, including some that are slightly larger (see objects 26 and 29). »Minutiae Objects« bring together the natural (illustrations of four different species of winged insect) and the man-made (two metal screws). The spiral form of the screws is one that Cornell associated with the unfolding of time, and is a motif that recurs throughout his work as a reference to the hidden order driving nature's patterns and cycles of growth. The contents of the other boxes, beads and glass chips, can perhaps be interpreted as eggs or larvae. Cornell avidly collected marbled endpapers from antique books, using the material here to create a specimen case in which to keep the small boxes.

## 6

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### PANORAMA

c. 1934  
Collage with ink on  
pleated and seamed  
paper  
Tokyo, private  
collection, Courtesy  
Shigeru Yokota, Inc.

This wonderful leporello collage is among the most accomplished works of Cornell's early career. It is an adventure starring the constellation Ursa Minor or Little Bear. The creature travels through »Chinese constellations«, the »partial eclipse« of a »siesta«, tea time at »five o'clock« and a sunset in Portugal, before visiting the leaning tower of Pisa and ending up in the »Bowl of the Big Dipper«, mixing daily routines with epic cosmic adventures. Astronomical and travel imagery is combined with playing cards and brightly coloured shapes that recall children's illustrations and games.

Such wide-format folded views of landscapes or cities were a feature of the nineteenth-century travel guides that Cornell so eagerly collected. As a traditional form of bookbinding in Japan, the pleated structure also speaks to his interest in the history of paper in Asia. It was through his manual work with paper, a key part of his artistic practice, that Cornell developed an interest in animation. »Panorama« can be »read« page by page like a book, or displayed open in leporello form, offering countless different combinations of image and text according to the viewer's angle of vision.

# 7

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## UNTITLED

c. 1932

Glass bell jar, wood,  
paint and printed paper  
collage

New York, Collection  
Timothy Baum

The first work that Cornell publicly exhibited, in January 1932, was a glass bell jar larger than the present example containing an assemblage of found objects. He made a number of such works during the early, experimental years of his career. They were often shown by galleries and museums alongside works by the European Surrealists, although Cornell sought to distance himself from this association. In this work, Cornell expands his idea of collage into a three-dimensional sculpture. Inside the bell jar – an object that became popular during the nineteenth century for displaying stuffed birds, model ships or arrangements of dried flowers – Cornell has placed a horse and rider. A playful nod to the heroic statuary of equestrian sculptures that stand over public squares in towns and cities across the world, the pair are frozen in mid-leap above the small red cone that supports them, a miniature monument to perpetual motion. Who they might be, we can only guess: characters from one of the many fairy tales that Cornell knew and loved, perhaps, or Lancelot bounding by on his way to Camelot?

# 8

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## OBJECT (TOWER OF BABEL AND CHILDREN OF ISRAEL)

1938

Cardboard box collaged  
with paper, wooden  
beads, blocks and  
tokens, cardboard and  
paper map  
Washington, D.C.,  
Smithsonian American  
Art Museum, Gift of  
the Joseph and Robert  
Cornell Memorial  
Foundation

This small, playful work brings together many of Cornell's great interests: travel, books, museums, historical art, language, games and childhood. A cardboard box has been covered and lined with architectural drawings: one half with a map of the museum district in Berlin, including the Altes Museum and Pergamonmuseum, the other with plans of the interiors of the same city's Alte Nationalgalerie. Cornell would have known these buildings from his collection of old Baedeker guidebooks, from whose covers he took the letters that are collaged onto the box and its contents. The work refers to the biblical story explaining the origin of different languages, the subject of a celebrated 1563 painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (belonging to the Kunsthistorisches Museum), which Cornell owned in postcard reproduction. On the inside of the box, the artist has written a series of instructions for the viewer, or »player«: »Place Tower on white circle-shadow (red disc) in red-lined area. Deposit children of Israel (red balls) on opposite side. Try to get the children of Israel past the Tower of Babel into the opposite side without moving the Tower outside of the white circle.«

## 9

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### UNTITLED

1933  
Collage on paper  
Osaka City Museum of  
Modern Art

## 10

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### UNTITLED

1934  
Collage on paper  
Washington, D.C.,  
Smithsonian American  
Art Museum, Gift of  
the Joseph and Robert  
Cornell Memorial  
Foundation

The iconography of childhood is a constant thread running through Cornell's work. As well as the Victorian engravings that he frequently used to explore this theme, his collages of the 1930s include images cut from magazines and books. Cornell was introduced to avant-garde photography at the New York galleries of Julien Levy and Alfred Stieglitz, and began actively to collect urban street photography that captured the poetic moments in everyday life. He felt a particular affinity for the works of Eugène Atget, and several prints by Henri Cartier-Bresson can be found in his archive. They include images of children playing similar to those that Cornell selected for this collage (object 10). Cornell's use of hand colouring in the neighbouring collage (object 9) marks a departure from his otherwise black-and-white compositions of this period. The coloured woollen balls seen here are taken from illustrations of the »gifts« – toys for learning in a variety of geometric shapes – developed by the German pedagogue Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852). Froebel's ideas about the role of play in learning became influential after his death and led to the development of the kindergarten. Cornell's own mother had trained as a kindergarten teacher before her marriage.

## 11

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### OBJECT (SOAP BUBBLE SET)

1941  
Glazed wooden box  
frame, paint, clay  
pipe, glass discs, paper  
collage  
The Robert Lehrman  
Art Trust, Courtesy  
of Aimee and Robert  
Lehrman

Cornell often made his works in series, producing variants on a single idea. The »Soap Bubble Sets« were his longest-running series, made over twenty years. They all reprise one of his most complex and rich metaphorical images: the soap bubble. It is a motif that fuses the iconography of eighteenth-century European painting – in which children blowing bubbles represent the ephemerality of innocence – with a scientist's fascination for the physical world. In this work, the soap bubbles take the form of overlapping glass discs, recalling the preparation of specimens and slides for microscopes; they bear images of shells or fossils that appear translucent, almost X-ray-like. Cornell marries the life of a bubble, gone in the blink of an eye, with the measure of geological time. As with so many of Cornell's works, it is an image that is both playful and serious, hovering between a magic trick and important scientific enquiry. The collection of clay pipes that Cornell acquired from the Dutch pavilion at the World's Fair in New York in 1939 was symbolic of his own ancestry, as both his parents were of Dutch descent. The iconography of the pipe also has strong Surrealist connotations, most famously portrayed in the work of René Magritte.



## 12

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### UNTITLED (TAMARA TOUMANOVA)

c. 1940  
Collage with tempera on paperboard  
Washington, D.C.,  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation

This work is one of four similar collages Cornell made around this time that were inspired by the internationally acclaimed Russian ballerina Tamara Toumanova (1919–1996). Cornell had watched Toumanova rehearse at the 51st Street Theater during his lunch breaks while he was working at a nearby textile studio, before being formally introduced to her in November 1940. Cornell saw her perform on numerous occasions and Toumanova visited him at his home on Utopia Parkway. Their contact consisted mainly of brief backstage encounters, when Cornell would often present her with homages that he had made for her. In this collage, unidentifiable creatures and shells surround the fairy-like figure of Toumanova, whose spiral headpiece resembles a unicorn's horn. Unified by a haze of fine specks of white paint, this fantastical, weightless scene conflates deep sea and deep space.

## 13

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### UNTITLED (M'LE FARETTI)

1933  
Glazed wooden box,  
cabinet photograph,  
antiqued mirrors,  
thread and hand-made  
ornaments  
Private collection

»Untitled (M'le Faretti)« is one of the first boxes assembled by Cornell, and was produced a short time after his debut solo exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York. The display case that he used was most probably purchased, a prefabricated container intended for storing and presenting collectibles. It was only a few years later, once he had acquired basic carpentry skills, that Cornell began to manufacture his own boxes. Even at this early stage, many of the formal characteristics of his later, mature works are conspicuous: the reproduction of a young protagonist, in this case a ballerina behind a curtain of pink and white cotton threads that form a grid over the central chamber of the work; the symmetrical placement of several identical objects within recesses in the lintel above; and the two flanking pillars of mirror to left and right. Cornell was a keen student of the ballet, its history and its performers. He came to know many of the leading dancers of his time, often dedicating works to them that he assembled using keepsakes and souvenir reproductions similar to those seen in this box.

## 14

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»LE VOYAGEUR  
DANS LES GLACES«:  
JOUET SURREALISTE

1935  
Cardboard box  
containing a metal  
contraption and seven  
double-sided discs with  
paper collage  
New York, Mark  
Kelman

To make this work, Cornell adapted a popular children's toy based on the nineteenth-century thaumatrope, an optical device used to provide animated entertainment before the advent of modern cinema. Cornell has pasted over the original pictures on the discs with his own collaged images, featuring found black-and-white illustrations of the night sky and photographs of human figures in motion. The gymnasts and athletes, both male and female, recall (and in some cases are taken from) the locomotive studies of the pioneering nineteenth-century photographers Etienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge. Their use of sequencing and serial imagery is something that Cornell himself adopted at an early stage in his career and went on to employ in many of his most significant objects (see object 17). Movement, either implied or actual, is an integral aspect of his work, often extending to involve the participation of the viewer. The original owner of this work would certainly have been encouraged to play with it. The word »Surrealiste« in the work's title hints at that group's interest in automatism, and the unexpected juxtapositions of images that Cornell's manipulation of the spinning thaumatrope device sets up.

## 15

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OBJECT FENÊTRE

1937  
Assemblage with  
Photostats, marbled  
paper and type on  
cardboard  
New York, Mark  
Kelman

Motion, and its manner of representation, interested Cornell from an early age. As a child, he was fascinated by optical devices that produced the illusion of cinematic movement, and he soon became fascinated by the cinema itself. »Object Fenêtre« is a work produced early in his career that deals with exactly these subjects. It is a small book, with tiny pages folded like an accordion. On each panel Cornell has pasted an image of what at first glance appears to be the same window, each slightly different from the one that precedes it. It is almost as if we are looking at successive frames from a short burst of film. Cornell experimented with the form of the book throughout his career, either by adapting volumes of agricultural and medical journals to accommodate groupings of small objects or altering them through the addition of collaged elements. The leporello form appears several times in his work – in »Panorama« (object 6), for example, produced just a couple of years earlier – as does the motif of the window, a source and signifier of physical and spiritual escape for him throughout his life.

## THIMBLE THEATER

Joseph Cornell and  
Lawrence Jordan  
c. 1938–40s  
16 mm film, black and  
white, with sound,  
approx. 6 minutes  
Lawrence Jordan

In the 1930s, Cornell began to collect early French and American films, many of them rare and sometimes unique. The collection became one of the largest and most comprehensive in New York, and Cornell sought advice on managing his stock from experts including Francis Doublier, a former cameraman for the Lumière Brothers. Later in the 1930s Cornell began making his own films. In a radical departure from established techniques, he created montages using excerpts of found footage. »Thimble Theater«, shown here, is one of a number of films that Cornell handed over in the 1960s to the filmmaker Lawrence Jordan, one of his assistants at Utopia Parkway. Jordan did not alter the editing structure, but worked to make the films printable and added soundtracks according to Cornell's notes, in this case the music of a fairground organ. »Thimble Theater« illustrates Cornell's deliberate manipulation of the speed, orientation and legibility of images. The sequence includes leaping circus lions, performing children, haphazard countdown numbers, falling »snow«, reversed and doubled images of cartoons in negative, and footage showing a zookeeper boxing with a kangaroo, the bout slowed to a mesmerising pace. Cornell is today recognised as a pioneer of avant-garde film.

OBJECT: HOTEL  
THEATRICALS BY  
THE GRANDSON OF  
MONSIEUR PHOT  
SUNDAY AFTER-  
NOONS

1940  
Glazed, hinged wooden  
cabinet; photographic  
reproductions, red,  
green, blue and black  
glass marbles, wood,  
paper collage, textiles  
Yokohama Museum  
of Art

Monsieur Phot is the fictional protagonist of a film script that Cornell wrote in 1933, whose plot describes the struggles of a photographer to convey the vitality of his experiences through still images. The sequential imagery of this box construction, made seven years later in 1940, is composed in the manner of a carte de visite, an early form of photographic contact sheet that emerged in late nineteenth-century France.

The typed captions beneath each row of images suggest the subjects of historic paintings, such as »Jacob Wrestling with the Angel« and »The Triumph of Galatea«. In early studio portrait photography sitters had to pose completely still – statue-like – to avoid blurring, and were often positioned among props such as columns and scenic backdrops that emulated classical paintings. The film-strip quality of this work reveals Cornell's extensive knowledge of the history of early photography and cinema in the context of the longer tradition of Western art. The glass marbles, free to roll on each carpeted shelf, physically embody the movement that had eluded Monsieur Phot.

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 UNTITLED (TO MARGUERITE BLACHAS)

1940

Book containing paper, silk, velvet, chain-link fencing, metal, synthetic hair and nacre  
 Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

The inside of an old book has been hollowed out, as if to create a secret hiding place for a family heirloom or an ingenious way to assist a prison break. As is typical for Cornell, this is no ordinary book. It is a volume of the *Journal d'agriculture pratique*, an agricultural almanac published in Paris in 1911 and most probably found on one of his wanderings through Lower Manhattan's bookshops. And what it contains is no less remarkable; a small map of a strip of coastline, like a guide to find buried treasure; a piece of burgundy velvet; a clipping of synthetic hair; a photograph of a white cat, like something from a fairy tale by Madame d'Aulnoy; the portrait of a young girl; and more. They are fictional souvenirs, relics from the life of the unknown lady to whom the work is dedicated; found objects housed within a found container, imbued with life and a story through Cornell's persuasive and poetic alchemy. As such, the piece constitutes one of the earliest examples of Cornell's habit of dedicating works in homage to specific persons. On a more formal level, the work perfectly illustrates his fascination with the interplay between word and image and the dimensional leap from collage to assemblage.

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 L'ÉGYPTE DE MLE CLÉO DE MÉRODE:  
 COURS ÉLÉMENTAIRE D'HISTOIRE NATURELLE

1940

Pre-existing nineteenth-century hinged oak box, marbled paper, glass bottles, cork, glass, paper collage  
 The Robert Lehrman Art Trust, Courtesy of Aimee and Robert Lehrman

This elaborate »bottle museum« is dedicated to the French dancer Cléo de Mérode (1875–1966). Cléo was famed for her beauty as much as her talent, and during the late nineteenth century her image became ubiquitous in France, appearing on everything from postcards to playing cards. She performed before King Edward II, the Tsar of Russia and the Khedive of Egypt. Her rumoured affair with King Leopold II of Belgium, who saw her perform in Verdi's Egyptian opera »Aïda« in Paris around 1895, contributed to her notoriety. By the time Cornell made this work Cléo had been all but forgotten, having made her last public performance in 1924. Here, however, he gallantly resurrects her reputation by envisioning for her a noble lineage linked with her namesake Cleopatra of Egypt. In doing so, Cornell conflates the Ancient Egyptian belief in the afterlife with the immortality offered by global fame. Part scientific specimen set, part jewellery box, its contents convey a range of references from topography, agriculture, flora and fauna to weather, clothing and rituals. Cléo herself is transformed into a Sphinx, her photographic portrait by Nadar nestled in yellow desert sand.

UNTITLED (THE  
CRYSTAL CAGE:  
PORTRAIT OF  
BERENICE)

c. 1934–67

Papered wood suitcase,  
photographs, printed  
and photomechanical  
reproductions, clippings  
from newspapers, books  
and magazines, typed  
and annotated notes,  
paper ephemera and  
collage

Richard L. Feigen

This sprawling dossier, assembled over more than thirty years, consists of paper ephemera and a collage contained within a papered wooden suitcase. Cornell revealed his thinking behind the work in a seven-page layout for the avant-garde magazine *View* in 1943. His essay, entitled »The Crystal Cage: Portrait of Berenice«, blends fact and fiction, presenting »research« in the form of text and images. It tells the story of an American girl who, on a visit to Europe, was so captivated by the Pagode de Chanteloup (an eighteenth-century folly that still stands in the Loire Valley) that her parents transported it back to New England for her to live in. Through the fictional character of Berenice – who stands for the ideal, universal young mind and a sort of alter-ego for the artist – we follow Cornell's own discoveries in nature, art and science. The image of the pagoda reappears in the magazine as a concrete poem, representing an inventory of his own varied interests.

PHARMACY

1943

Hinged, glass-paned  
wooden cabinet;  
marbled paper, mirror,  
glass sheets, twenty  
glass bottles containing  
various printed paper  
cuttings (crêpe, tissue,  
printed engravings,  
maps), coloured sand,  
pigment, coloured  
aluminium foil, feather,  
a paper butterfly wing,  
a dried leaf, a blue  
glass marble, fibres,  
driftwood, wooden  
marbles, glass rods,  
beads, sea shell,  
translucent crystals,  
stone, wood shavings,  
sawdust, sulphate,  
copper, wire, fruit pits,  
golden paint, water,  
cork

Collection Paul Schärer

There are six known works in the »Pharmacy« series, of which this is thought to be the first. Its form recalls the historic apothecary cabinets that were used as dispensaries of medicine before the advent of modern pharmacies. Twenty glass vials are arranged in gleaming rows, each of them filled with precious ingredients. They could be charms or spells to ease troubles of the soul, rather than to mend the body (drugs of any sort were forbidden to Cornell, a Christian Scientist). And yet material transformation is also suggested – what looks like sulphur or salt could also be a catalyst used by alchemists to change base metals into gold. Cornell believed in the healing power of the mind and of making art, and that the poetry of the everyday was transformative; for him, the symbolic value of materials was far more important than their intrinsic worth. »Pharmacy« was made when Cornell was in regular touch with his friend, Marcel Duchamp. By a twist of fate, Duchamp came to know this particular work intimately. Its first owner was the dealer Pierre Matisse, son of the artist Henri, and it remained in the collection of his wife Teeny following their divorce in 1949. Teeny subsequently married Duchamp, and this work was kept in their home.

## MUSEUM

1949

Pre-existing wooden chest with inlaid decoration, Photostat, paper collage, coloured cotton thread, cardboard cylinders with various contents  
Private collection

During the 1940s Cornell made a series of »Museums«. He adapted existing hinged wooden chests and filled them with glass bottles or other vessels. In this work, ten of the cylinders stand vertically and have scrolled-paper ends, a motif suggestive of the early written histories of ancient civilisations. They can be opened, revealing linings of marbled paper and collaged images, and contain trinkets and toys that recall the collecting impulses of children (wooden beads, cork and rubber balls, feathers, spinning tops, seashells and so on). The other ten cylinders sit horizontally. Sealed shut, they have images of clock faces collaged onto their ends, introducing the idea of stopped time – the underlying concept of a museum. Each one of them is charged with the potential of an unopened parcel. When shaken, their unknown contents produce different sounds. One of them contains only silence. Cornell probably knew the American experimental composer John Cage, whose controversial »silent« score »4'33"« premiered in August 1952 (having been conceived as early as 1947).

## NAPLES

c. 1942

Glazed wooden box, metal handle, wine glass, paint, photograph, shell, mirrors, thread, textile, paper collage, cork  
The Robert Lehrman Art Trust, Courtesy of Aimee and Robert Lehrman

Naples was one of those distant cities, steeped in culture and history, of which Cornell dreamed. It was the birthplace of Fanny Cerrito, the tiny ballerina who was his favourite among the Romantic dancers who toured Europe during the nineteenth century. Here the seashell that leans in a corner of the box, which is bordered by a sea-green painted frame, represents the legend of Ondine, a role first played by Cerrito at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, in 1843. Naples was also a city in which Cornell's beloved nineteenth-century divas Giuditta Pasta and Maria Malibran regularly sang. This miniature diorama, complete with washing line, baggage label and a photographic reproduction of one of Naples's famously narrow streets, is Cornell's homage to the city. For many years he kept a dossier entitled »The Bay of Naples«, filled with clippings, old mezzotints, views of Vesuvius, engravings of Cerrito and reproductions of works by the Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico. Cornell, an ardent pacifist, was greatly distressed by the destruction of the city by Allied bombing during the Second World War, which was taking place at the time that he made this work.

## 25

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### UNTITLED (MUSIC BOX)

c. 1947  
Box construction with cardboard, printed paper collage, postage stamps, maps, bells and rattles  
New York, Collection Timothy Baum

This object is one of the most enigmatic of Cornell's entire oeuvre. A box has been wrapped up like a parcel and covered with a palimpsest of collaged texts, maps and colourful postage stamps of different geographical origins, as if midway through an epic journey between a community of anonymous senders and recipients, never quite able to reach its elusive addressee. Sealed within it are an unknown number of small bells and rattles, which jingle and clatter when the work is moved. The box is, quite literally, a musical instrument, though one for strictly private amusement. It brings together two of Cornell's most ardent fascinations: travel, in the form of the stamps he collected as a young boy and which represented for him the exoticism of far-off places that he knew but never saw; and the dimension of sound, which he had experimented with and incorporated into his work since the mid-1930s. In this respect the box closely resembles objects that Cornell knew well: Marcel Duchamp's »With Hidden Noise« of 1916, which contains an unknown object placed within it by the collector Walter Arensberg, and Robert Rauschenberg's later series of »Elemental Sculptures«, first shown at the Stable Gallery in September 1953 (the gallery that Cornell was to join two years later).

## 26

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### UNTITLED

c. 1939–40, c. 1957  
Cylindrical paperboard box, paper collage  
Switzerland, Beda Jedlicka

## 30

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### UNTITLED

1952  
Cylindrical paperboard box, paper collage, glass discs with paint  
New York, Mark Kelman

Circular motifs recur throughout Cornell's work. The subject of these two works is the earth and its atmosphere. In the first of them (object 26), the round form of the box is appropriate for the subject: a fictional journey around the world. The paper discs each show different photographic and printed images of tourist sights and maps that together form a long itinerary of exotic destinations. The box itself is covered inside and out with maps of Italy, Central Europe and the River Nile. Postage stamps from Angola, Ifni and Spanish Guinea refer to the European colonisation of Africa. The second, later work (object 30), contains images cut out from colour magazines, some backed by text from old encyclopaedias, and two glass discs, one spattered with white paint. They immediately recall the blue skies found in paintings by René Magritte, an artist that Cornell admired greatly (see objects 63 and 65). The appearance on some of the discs of charts with numbers and a compass also points to Cornell's interest in weather systems and meteorology. Seen together, these two collections of paper discs illustrate Cornell's ability to condense time and space through deceptively simple means, while also demonstrating the poetic interplay between travel, observation and collecting in his work.

## A PARROT FOR JUAN GRIS

1953–54, »rejuvenated«  
24 June 1957  
Glazed wooden box  
with wooden parts;  
cut chromolithograph;  
paper collage; ink;  
crayon; metal dowel and  
ring; string; cork ball;  
folded note  
Collection Robert  
Lehrman, Courtesy  
of Aimee and Robert  
Lehrman

This box is the first of twenty different works that Cornell dedicated to the Spanish cubist painter Juan Gris (1887–1927). The lively composition shows Cornell's instinctive understanding of the language of cubist collage, a style made famous by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. He was inspired to make the works after seeing a particular painting by Gris in a New York gallery, depicting a man reading a newspaper at a café table. Cornell's composition resembles aspects of Gris's painting: echoed shadows and silhouettes, a focus on the texture of woodgrain, intersecting diagonal, vertical and horizontal divisions and flashes of bright colour. All the works in Cornell's series feature a depiction of a cockatoo, which was not in fact present in Gris's original composition. The two artists shared a love of decorative papers, and here Cornell has used patterned and colourful pieces, pages from an old French history book, newspapers, maps of the coast of Mozambique and a Portuguese postage stamp.

## TILLY LOSCH

c. 1935  
Glazed wooden box,  
marbled paper, printed  
paper collage, string,  
bead, cardboard  
Collection Robert  
Lehrman, Courtesy  
of Aimee and Robert  
Lehrman

## LETTER FROM JOSEPH CORNELL TO TILLY LOSCH

Christmas 1943  
Typewritten letter with  
collage, stickers and  
thread on paper  
State University of New  
York at Binghamton,  
Special Collections,  
Glen G. Bartle Library,  
Max Reinhardt Archive

Born in Vienna in 1907, Tilly Losch began studying ballet at the age of six, and at twelve was already dancing on the stage of the Staatsooper. She worked as an actress and choreographer for the German theatre director and filmmaker Max Reinhardt, before joining George Balanchine's company. In 1943 she moved to New York, and soon afterwards visited an exhibition of Cornell's work at the Julien Levy Gallery. Cornell was thrilled to hear this, and produced a charming collage-letter (object 29) as a gift for her, which he personally delivered to the Ambassador Hotel on 21st December 1943. At the foot of a large Christmas tree sits the young Losch; the text can be lifted to reveal the body of the tree decorated with miniature wrapped presents. A short time later, in February 1944, Cornell and Losch met and became friends. She later acquired this small box (object 28) that he had made several years earlier, in which a young girl floats above snow-covered mountains, hanging from the fragile threads of an unseen hot air balloon. She is suspended, both literally and figuratively, as a young girl of eternal grace and innocence. As a dedicated balleromane, Cornell would have known that dancers in the nineteenth century were often hoisted up on wires to give the illusion that they were floating above the stage.



## 32

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### UNTITLED (COMPARTMENTED BOX)

c. 1954–56  
Box construction (see catalogue for precise listing of contents)  
Stockholm, Moderna Museet

## 33

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### UNTITLED (PINTURICCHIO BOY)

1942–1952  
Box construction (see catalogue for precise listing of contents)  
Glenstone

## 34

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### UNTITLED (MEDICI PRINCESS)

c. 1948  
Box construction (see catalogue for precise listing of contents)  
New York, Private collection

During the 1940s and 50s, Cornell produced a series of boxes and collages dedicated to the Medici, the legendary family that ruled Florence from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. Patrons of the Italian Renaissance, they oversaw a period that witnessed profound advances in human knowledge and the birth of the concept of individual artistic identity. Defined by interdisciplinary curiosity and a fascination with mechanical wonders, it was a time in which Cornell himself would have felt very much at home. He was, in his own way, a »Renaissance man«, seeking connections between art, science and faith.

In these works, Cornell fuses the »high« art of the Renaissance with the pop culture of the penny-arcade games that he played a child in the Coney Island amusement parks. Two of them (objects 33 and 34) have the tripartite form of an altarpiece, with side compartments suggesting certain narrative with their resemblance to filmstrips and scenes from the lives of saints. Cornell's interest in serial imagery and the grid structure is most vividly articulated in »Untitled (Compartmented Box)«, which recalls the tradition of portrait miniatures that originated during the Renaissance. This work also seems to anticipate the works of Andy Warhol made a decade later (Warhol was an admirer of Cornell's work, and visited him at his studio in June 1963).

## 35

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### UNTITLED (MEDICI BOY)

c. 1953  
Box construction (see catalogue for precise listing of contents)  
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

## 36

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### UNTITLED (MEDICI VARIANT)

c. 1955  
Box construction (see catalogue for precise listing of contents)  
Wassenaar, Caldic Collectie

Each of the works takes as its central motif a young figure lifted from a Renaissance painting and reproduced as a Photostat. Seen left to right, these are: »Head of a Boy« by a follower of Caravaggio (Hartford, Wadsworth Atheneum); Bernardino Pinturicchio's »Portrait of a Boy« (1480–85; Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister); Bronzino's »Portrait of Bia de' Medici« (c. 1542; Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi); Sofonisba Anguissola's »Portrait of Marquess Massimiliano Stampa« (1557; Baltimore, Walters Art Museum); and finally, »Head of a Boy« once again.

Two of the works are tinted blue, giving them the look and feel of early cinema. Another is placed behind amber-coloured glass, reminiscent of an early sepia photograph. Several of them are lined with Baedeker maps and architectural plans that suggest wealth, domination and a comfortable life. But they are tempered by reminders that these young figures find themselves at the mercy of fate, chance and accident: dice-like cubes, balls and lines on the glass that resemble the cross-hairs of a gunshot. Through these works, Cornell conveys nostalgia for his own childhood and a deep reverence for this most innocent phase of life.

## UNTITLED (THE LIFE OF LUDWIG II OF BAVARIA)

c. 1941–52

Papered wood suitcase with sepia photograph mounted inside lid, containing one bound book, one printed folio of photographic reproductions, two rectangular boxes with clear glass miniature swans, two cylindrical boxes with broken glassware and crockery shards  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation, 1996

Throughout his life, Cornell assembled meticulous dossiers on individuals and places of great personal significance, often drawn from the worlds of literature, ballet, film or opera. These would contain clippings from newspapers and magazines, reproductions of historical engravings, objects and other keepsakes, some of which might find their way into his works. Among the most comprehensive of all, and presented as a single work, was a collection of printed papers and objects relating to the colourful life of King Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845–1886), known as the »Swan King« because of his love for the regal bird. Housed in a suitcase are a biography of the eccentric monarch; original photographs of him and his fairy-tale castle at Neuschwanstein; a number of miniature glass swans; an envelope containing a lock of blond hair; broken glassware and crockery shards; and two swan bones. Both castles and swans would have appealed to Cornell as a lover of the ballet; indeed, he was probably inspired to begin assembling this dossier after seeing Léonide Massine's production of »Bacchanale« in New York in 1939, a one-act ballet depicting the dreams of Ludwig II with libretto and set design by Salvador Dalí.

## PALACE

1943

Glass-paned, stained wooden box, photographic reproduction, mirror, wood, charred bark, spray-painted twigs  
Houston, The Menil Collection, formerly in the collection of Christophe de Menil

A vast white palace stands before a barren winter landscape. The lost splendour of European courtly life has been frozen in time, preserved forever as a world-in-miniature that conjures up memories of fairy tales and children's doll's houses. It brings to mind Hans Christian Andersen, a kindred spirit of Cornell's who is known to have played with toy theatres, and Charles Perrault's 1696 tale of »Sleeping Beauty« in which the princess is put to sleep in her castle for a hundred years, during which time a forest grows up around it.

»Palace« belongs to a series of works that Cornell made between 1942 and the mid-1950s, using Photostat reproductions of historical engravings that he kept in a dossier in his studio. Some of the buildings are real, and some imaginary. The boxes that he made from them are the most theatrical of his career; Cornell further emphasised this quality by using mirrored windows to draw the viewer into the scene as an unwitting performer in his or her own imagined drama.

## BEEHIVE

1940–1948  
 Prefabricated wooden  
 Shaker-style box, mirror,  
 cork, paper collage,  
 metal thimbles, glass  
 beads  
 Richard L. Feigen

Peering through a tiny hole in the side of a round plywood box, we see a thimble. Four more identical thimbles sit nearby, each of them reflected ad infinitum in the mirrored panels that line the box's interior, like trees in a forest. When viewed from above, the ordered placement of the thimbles recalls the geometric pattern of a beehive. Cornell has constructed a miniature world, reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's 1865 novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Indeed, an exhibition of a number of such works in 1948 was accompanied by a description in the artist's own words of »a world of looking-glasses where one feels like Alice shrunk to the size of an insect«. In a line from his 1974 poem dedicated to Cornell, the great Mexican poet Octavio Paz offered an alternative comparison, referencing Hans Christian Andersen: *Thumbelina in gardens of reflection*.

The architecture of the work recalls the early optical devices that are known to have fascinated Cornell, such as the Victorian zoetropes and praxinoscopes, cylindrical drums lined with images that produced the illusion of motion when spun. »Beehive« perfectly illustrates Cornell's interest in miniaturisation and games of scale, and in eliciting the participation of his viewer.

A DRESSING ROOM  
FOR GILLE

1939  
 Glazed wooden box,  
 wood panel cover,  
 paint, mirror, cork,  
 printed paper collage,  
 cotton thread, textiles,  
 ribbon tape  
 Richard L. Feigen

In his work, Cornell turns his attention to Pierrot, the iconic commedia dell'arte actor in Antoine Watteau's well-known 1718–19 painting (once nicknamed »Gilles«) that hangs in the Louvre. It was a work that Cornell had never seen in person, but which held a particular fascination for him. For in the character's awkwardness, his poignancy, and his dreamy romantic self-consciousness, Cornell sensed a kindred spirit. He can be read almost as a self-portrait. Pierrot was the victim of his own dreams of love, and here Cornell has separated the paper cut-out figure into three sections, tied together with a cloth ribbon and suspended from the top of the box: he can be »played«, like a puppet. Cornell has taken him out of the French countryside and placed him in a backstage dressing room, with sawdust on the floor, theatrical mirrored walls and a diamond-patterned backdrop that recalls the design of a Harlequin's costume. Unlike his friend Marcel Duchamp's irreverent reworking of another Louvre masterpiece, the »Mona Lisa«, Cornell has revisited the art of the past to draw a deeply personal connection to the wistful and melancholic nature that was integral to his own artistic sensibility.

## 42

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### UNTITLED (FORTUNE)

c. 1967 or before  
Metal mirror with fabric  
backing, plastic swan  
and paper tag inscribed  
»fortune«  
New York, Collection  
Timothy Baum

## 43

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### UNTITLED

c. 1945  
Wooden box, blue glass,  
rhinestones, printed  
paper collage, paint  
The Collection of  
Marguerite and Robert  
Hoffman

Cornell made more than twenty works inspired by the Russian ballerina Tamara Toumanova, whom he met in 1940 and corresponded with after she moved to Hollywood in 1942. These homages range from intricate box constructions containing fragments of costumes that she gave him, to an elaborate scrapbook compiled from magazine pages and photos of her that he saved. In Cornell's mind the graceful Toumanova was strongly associated with one of her most memorable roles: Odette in Tchaikovsky's 1876 ballet »Swan Lake«, a princess who falls victim to an evil sorcerer, who transforms her into a swan to keep her from her lover. In »Untitled (Fortune)«, a single image appears to have been cut and set in several layers; in fact, Cornell combined at least three different engravings, reproduced as Photostats, matching their scale and contours to create this jigsaw-like stage set in miniature. In the second work (object 43) Cornell creates a similar scene by combining two simple, unspectacular objects to evoke deeply romantic sensibility. A plastic swan, of the sort found in a Christmas cracker or a Manhattan dime store, is placed atop a hand mirror to create the illusion of water. This work was owned by Toumanova herself.

## 46

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### PLANET SET, TÊTE ÉTOILÉE, GIUDITTA PASTA (DÉDICACE)

1950  
Glazed wooden box,  
liqueur glasses, crystal,  
wood and paper collage  
London, Tate

## 48

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### SOAP BUBBLE SET

1948  
Glazed wooden box,  
printed map, painted  
object, liqueur glass,  
velvet, metal, glass  
sheets, clay pipes  
Mr and Mrs John  
Stravinsky

These three boxes (objects 46, 48, 49) illustrate Cornell's interest in the world and the universe, something that had fascinated and troubled him since his early childhood. The central work, »Soap Bubble Set« (object 48), is part of a series that Cornell made over twenty years. They all contain one of his most complex and metaphorical images, the soap bubble, depicted here in the form of a nineteenth-century print of the moon. It is a motif that fuses the iconography of Old Masters vanitas paintings – in which children blowing bubbles represent the ephemerality of innocence, and pipes and drinking glasses represent worldly life and its transient pleasures – with a scientist's fascination for the physical world. By presenting the cratered surface of the moon as if it were a giant soap bubble, Cornell leads the viewer's imagination towards ranges of scale and the limits of measurement, telescoping extreme contrasts of size, texture and age. To the left of this box sits a work that Cornell made two years later (object 46) and dedicated to the Italian soprano Giuditta Pasta (1797–1865), whose voice was lost to time as she died before the advent of sound recording. Cornell came across a lithographic portrait of her that sparked his interest around 1942, and the great prima donna became the subject of an extensive dossier assembled by the artist. The connection between the rapturous experiences of

UNTITLED  
(CELESTIAL  
NAVIGATION)

c. 1956–58  
Glazed wooden box,  
various paper collage,  
cordial glasses, two blue  
marbles, driftwood, map  
pins, collaged wooden  
cylinders, metal rod,  
drawer, white sand,  
shells, ball bearings  
The Robert Lehrman Art  
Trust, Courtesy of Aimee  
and Robert Lehrman

Pasta's singing and the contemplation of the night sky was perhaps prompted by Cornell's reading of an 1823 account by one of her contemporaries, the French writer Stendhal: »Where should I find words adequate to describe the vision of celestial beauty which spread before us in dazzling glory when Madame Pasta sings, or the strange glimpses into the secrets of sublime and fantastic passions which her art affords us?« The third box, »Untitled (Celestial Navigation)« was made during the 1950s, a decade of expanding scientific frontiers – outwards into space and inwards to the structure of the atom. The prospect of human space travel and nuclear energy called for a reassessment of man's place in the universe. In this work Cornell presents a window within a window, as if the sky chart on the back wall is the view from the cockpit of a spacecraft or a radar tracking screen in a control tower. The numerical tables that Cornell added on either side of the central image suggest data readings or calculations, looking back to the historical importance of recording empirical observations in astronomy, and anticipating the predictive capabilities of computer programming. Underneath, the drawer is lined with a deep-blue night-sky map and filled with white sand, ball bearings and conical spiral shells.

WEATHER  
SATELLITES

c. 1965  
Collage on paper  
New York, Whitney  
Museum of American  
Art, Purchase with  
funds from The  
Lily Auchincloss  
Foundation, Richard  
Brown Baker, the John  
I. H. Baur Purchase  
Fund, the Felicia Meyer  
March Purchase Fund,  
Mr and Mrs William  
A. Marsteller and an  
anonymous donor

OBSERVATIONS OF A  
SATELLITE I

c. 1960  
Collage on paper  
Tokyo, Private  
collection

In Cornell's late collages, certain motifs often appear in several different works. Both of these works feature the image of a glass bell jar. It was taken from the cover of the journal *Scientific American* (January 1953), promoting an article about the metabolism of the hummingbird, which allows it to journey across the Gulf of Mexico. In the upper right corner of both bell jars we see the reflected image of a cork-stoppered glass bottle. Appearing to float, it brings to mind the message in a bottle and all the metaphorical associations of that image: a distress call, a final hope, a leap of faith. A glinting, green icosahedron cut from a mathematical book in Cornell's collection hangs mysteriously in the blue sky. It is almost as if the jars have landed on the surface of an alien planet and are sustaining the atmosphere for their inhabitants to breathe. One contains a young princess teleported from seventeenth-century Spain (the infanta from Diego Velázquez's painting »Las Meninas«); the other contains samples of various minerals. Cornell lived through the age of space exploration and would have read with interest about advances in communication and satellite technology. The first weather satellites began transmitting murky images of cloud cover back to earth in around 1960.

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**UNTITLED (AVIARY  
WITH PARROT AND  
DRAWERS)**

1949

Wooden box, glazed  
central compartment,  
modified pre-existing  
wooden drawers, colour  
lithograph, wood pieces,  
watch springs

The Robert Lehrman  
Art Trust, Courtesy  
of Aimee and Robert  
Lehrman

In 1949, an exhibition of Cornell's work titled »Aviary« was presented at the Egan Gallery in New York. It brought together twenty-six box constructions, most of them made that year. Cornell conceived the exhibition as a total experience for visitors, with the works arranged in a brightly lit room at different heights. In his foreword for the exhibition brochure, the American novelist Donald Windham wrote: »Birds are remarkable for the distances they travel, for their faculty [...] of knowing the relations between remote places. The essence of Joseph Cornell's art is this same genius for sensing the connection between seemingly remote ideas.« Fond of all birds, Cornell was particularly partial to parrots, which are closely linked with humans in their mimicry of speech. Historically, exotic birds were kept by rulers as prestigious pets, or as prized specimens in seventeenth-century European Wunderkammers, trophies of man's voyages to the far reaches of the world. In this work the imposing, richly coloured bird presides over the banks of drawers – worn with use and full of possibilities – inscrutably guarding the knowledge of their contents.

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**HABITAT GROUP  
FOR A SHOOTING  
GALLERY**

1945

Hinged wooden cabinet;  
glass (shattered by the  
artist), wood, paint,  
printed clippings, cut-  
out colour lithographs,  
shredded newspaper,  
dried plant material and  
feathers

Iowa, Des Moines Art  
Center, purchased with  
funds from the Coffin  
Fine Arts Trust; Nathan  
Emory Coffin Collection  
of the Des Moines Art  
Center, 1975-27

During the 1930s, Cornell had a revelatory experience in a pet shop. This encounter with a display of caged tropical birds made a profound impression on him, and he set out to capture the »exotic colourings« and »effect of prolonged motion from mobiles«. In this work, lavishly detailed colour lithographs of two macaws, a parrot and a cockatoo are arranged in a hectic composition of splattered paint and shattered glass that involved sudden, bold gestures in its making. Numeric game counters become targets, the flat cut-out birds evoking Cornell's childhood experience of the shooting galleries at Coney Island's amusement parks, where live parrots were kept by fortune tellers. The work is a direct response to the devastating violence of the Second World War, which troubled Cornell deeply. The French clippings pasted onto the interior walls, one featuring an equestrian statue set in a square, point to a European context. Cornell, an avid birdwatcher, saw creatures of flight as positive symbols, pure spirits able to travel vast distances at will. In this instance the birds stand in for the human victims, and the work becomes a poignant meditation on the destruction of life, culture and freedom by war.

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 UNTITLED (OWL HABITAT)

Mid- to late 1940s  
 Wooden box  
 construction with blue  
 glass, coloured print  
 cut-out, bark, wood,  
 pulverised plant matter,  
 painted lichen  
 Collection Jasper Johns

This work belongs to a series of »Habitats« that feature owls, woodpeckers, wrens and sparrows, as well as the occasional rabbit, butterfly and spider. Unlike other works which play with the language of domestic bird cages and pet stores (objects 53 and 54), the »Habitats« are conceived as recreations of natural environments. During the 1930s Cornell worked various day jobs, meaning that his art-making was confined to the twilight hours. The nocturnal owl was therefore a creature with which he identified. In his diaries Cornell recounts the pleasure that he took in making trips on his bicycle to collect the organic materials needed to make the boxes. While the Habitats share some characteristics with the dioramas of natural-history museums, their ethereal quality has much to do with the owl's potent symbolism. In different cultures owls are seen as icons of wisdom, insight, foresight and death, messengers between earthly and supernatural worlds or, as Cornell once told friends, good luck symbols for actresses. The forest is a setting prevalent in the tradition of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Cornell was familiar with the opera »Der Freischütz« (1821) by the German composer Carl Maria von Weber, in which there is a famous scene featuring an owl.

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 OBJECT: LES ABELLES ONT ATTAQUÉ LE BLEU CÉLESTE PÂLE

1940  
 Glazed wooden box,  
 engraving, rhinestones,  
 cork, paint and paper  
 cut-outs  
 Collection Robert  
 Lehrman, Courtesy  
 of Aimee and Robert  
 Lehrman

This is one of Cornell's most theatrical boxes, a miniature drama that recalls the puppet theatres of his childhood. A group of men are shown racing through a forest, dressed in seventeenth-century French costume. Several of them are on horseback, like characters from Alexandre Dumas's 1844 novel *The Three Musketeers*. A shape has been cut out of the steel engraving to leave space for a telegram-like stream of words, spoken by the figure hiding behind the tree and pasted over the blue-tinted landscape behind. Translated into English, they read: »the bees attacked the pale sky-blue«. The bees are represented in the work by sparkling rhinestones, buzzing around the tree. Many different interpretations have been offered for the meaning of the words, including coded references to the German invasion of France, which was taking place at the time the work was made. Cornell listened to the radio constantly as he worked, and one can sense the anxiety that would have accompanied the news bulletins, with their reports of violence and destruction in far-off lands. The interplay between word and image is a distinctly European feature of Cornell's work, and something that he shares with artists such as Marcel Duchamp and René Magritte.

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**SORROWS OF  
YOUNG WERTHER**

c. 1966  
Collage with  
photomechanical  
reproduction, paper,  
gouache and ink on  
fibreboard  
Washington, D.C.,  
Smithsonian Institution,  
Hirshhorn Museum and  
Sculpture Garden, Gift  
of Joseph H. Hirshhorn,  
1972

On top of the background of a double-page magazine spread, Cornell has placed an image of a boy holding his white dog by a lead (taken from an unidentified painting). The elevated perspective, looking down over a woman lying naked in a forest, produces a voyeuristic effect. The woman's clothes lie discarded around her and she too is accompanied by a dog, curled against the base of the leftmost tree. The eyes of both figures directly address the viewer, as if gazing out from separate, yet mysteriously linked, dimensions of time. The boy's blue coat and the work's title identify him as Werther, the protagonist of the partially autobiographical novel that brought its 24-year-old author, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, fame following its publication in 1774. This tragic story of doomed love is told through a series of letters from the passionate and highly sensitive Werther to his friend Wilhelm. Ultimately Werther commits suicide, wearing the blue coat that was special to him because he had worn it when he danced with the object of his adoration, Charlotte. Cornell's library contained several biographies of Goethe. As someone whose achievements spanned poetry, botany, colour theory, anatomy and philosophy, and whose early life was defined by unrequited love, Goethe held a firm place in Cornell's pantheon of kindred spirits.

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**HÖLDERLIN OBJECT**

1944–1946  
Pre-existing wooden  
chest, blue glass,  
marbled paper, velvet,  
oak leaf, book, string  
Private collection,  
Courtesy Pavel Zoubok  
Gallery

A small wooden box is opened like a reliquary to reveal its contents: an old book neatly bound in string and set beneath a sheet of blue glass, and embedded in its lid, a large oak leaf, a traditional symbol of power, majesty and the German nation. Framed by blue velvet and strips of delicately applied marbled paper, they together form a symbolic homage from Cornell to the great German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843). The blue glass, a formal device that Cornell often used, brings to the work a mysterious, otherworldly quality, and a sense of what Hölderlin would have called *Sehnsucht*, or longing. Cornell was a great admirer of the Romantic era, its ballet, music, literature, scientific investigation and philosophy. It was an age that he considered to possess »more unity«. Among his favourites were the German writers, including Goethe, Novalis and Hölderlin. During the span of his career, Cornell created individual works in dedication to them all.



PAOLO AND  
FRANCESCA

1943–1948  
Box construction  
with paper cut-out,  
velvet, blue glass and  
rhinestones  
The Robert Lehrman  
Art Trust, Courtesy  
of Aimee and Robert  
Lehrman

Two cloaked figures sit huddled on a bench in a moonlit garden reading a book. They are Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini, a thirteenth-century Italian couple who fell in love despite both being married (she to his older brother, Gianciotto, who killed them both upon discovering their affair). In the first volume of »The Divine Comedy«, completed in 1320 by their contemporary Dante Alighieri, they can be found trapped in the eternal whirlwind of the second circle of hell, reserved for the lustful and other tragic lovers. The book they are reading is the story of the Arthurian knight Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, who also shared an illicit love. Cornell has chosen instead to portray them in a moment of calm, either before they were discovered or in a romantic, blue-tinted afterlife. It has been suggested that the couple might represent the figures of Cornell's own parents, tragically separated by his father's early death in 1917, just as the opera »Paolo and Francesca«, based on Gabriele D'Annunzio's novel, was being performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

UNTITLED OBJECT  
(MONA LISA)

c. 1940–42  
Cylindrical cardboard  
box sealed with painted  
clear glass, containing  
photographic  
reproductions, sequins,  
hairpin, glass beads, and  
black paper fragment  
The Collection of  
Marguerite and Robert  
Hoffman

Pasted into the inside and the lid of »Untitled Object (Mona Lisa)« are two cut-out details of a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's much-loved and endlessly discussed half-length portrait of a woman. While the work in question can certainly be read as a reference to one of the great artists of the past, it is far more likely to have been conceived as a homage to Cornell's friend and contemporary Marcel Duchamp. Over twenty years earlier, in 1919, Duchamp had famously desecrated a reproduction of Leonardo's masterpiece with the irreverent addition of a moustache and goatee beard. Cornell and Duchamp first met in 1933. Around the time that »Untitled Object (Mona Lisa)« was completed, Duchamp asked Cornell to assist him with the production of his Boîtes-en-valises, an edition of portable cases that contained miniature reproductions of his own works. A little over twenty years after this object was made, in February 1963, Cornell was one of more than a million visitors who saw the »Mona Lisa« during its three-and-a-half-week exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

## 62

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### UNTITLED (PORTRAIT OF LEILA IN LETTERS)

Late 1960s  
Collage  
New York, Collection  
Timothy Baum

## 63

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### MICA MAGRITTE II: TIME TRANSFIXED

c. 1965  
Collage  
The Robert Lehrman Art  
Trust, Courtesy of Aimee  
and Robert Lehrman

## 64

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### UNTITLED (PENNY ARCADE, PASCAL'S TRIANGLE)

c. 1965  
Collage  
Collection Robert  
Lehrman, Courtesy  
of Aimee and Robert  
Lehrman

This group of five late collages all point to Cornell's interest and engagement with the history of art. The first of them, »Untitled (Portrait of Leila in Letters)«, combines colour reproductions of two paintings by the German-born Old Master painter Hans Memling. The face of the woman, taken from a »Madonna and Child« of 1487, gazes into a void created by Cornell's omission of the Christ child and his placement of two interlocking L-shapes, taken from the central part of a 1484 triptych featuring St Christopher, the patron saint of travellers. The subject of this work is the American socialite and travel writer Leila Hadley, who spent extended periods of time with Cornell at Utopia Parkway and developed a close friendship with him.

Cornell quoted as readily from his contemporaries as he did from historic sources, as the two collages dedicated to René Magritte (objects 63 and 65) demonstrate. In »Untitled (After René Magritte, La clef de verre, 1959)«, Cornell has framed the Belgian Surrealist's enigmatic image of a rock finely balanced on a mountain ridge and placed it above an aerial view of what appears to be a coastal region. This window-like framing can also be found in Cornell's composition »Mica Magritte II: Time Transfixed«, made with an image of the iconic 1938 painting »La Durée poignardée«. This collage is one of a number of closely-related works

## 65

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### UNTITLED (AFTER RENÉ MAGRITTE, LA CLEF DE VERRE, 1959)

c. 1965  
Collage  
Salem, Massachusetts,  
Peabody Essex Museum,  
Gift of the Joseph  
and Robert Cornell  
Memorial Foundation,  
2005

## 66

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### ANDROMEDA

1956  
Collage  
Private collection

that Cornell dedicated to his late brother Robert, who had for some time been confined to the living room of Utopia Parkway, where his collection of model trains was kept.

Hanging nearby, »Untitled (Penny Arcade, Pascal's Triangle)« recalls the work of a younger contemporary, the American artist Jasper Johns. Cornell's Penny Arcade collages all carry an intense nostalgia for the enchantments of childhood. The leaping equestrian silhouette evokes rocking horses and the carousels in Central Park – the vertical arrangement of hearts and the blue star-shape could be the pole, while the concentric circles perhaps represent its turning. The reverse of the work is also collaged, with a reference to the French mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), the image of a child and the illuminated glow of Times Square and the Manhattan skyline.

The group is completed by »Andromeda«, which marvellously combines a landscape from the magazine *Arizona Highways*, a female figure (the English starlet Jackie Lane), and a detail from Peter Paul Rubens' painting »The Four Continents«, belonging to the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. In this interpretation of the tale, Cornell has given Lane the role of Andromeda, possibly because her pose in this photograph reminded him of his favourite constellation picture (see object 67).

ANDROMEDA:  
GRAND HÔTEL DE  
L'OBSERVATOIRE

1954  
Glass-paned wooden  
box, painted and paper-  
covered wood, metal  
rod and chain, paper  
collage with Photostats  
New York, Solomon R.  
Guggenheim Museum,  
Partial gift, C. and  
B. Foundation, by  
exchange, 1980

A partially whitewashed clipping in the lower left of this work reads »Grand Hôtel de l'Univers«. In Cornell's hands, the hotel becomes a metaphor for time and space, fused with the romance of the stars through the myth of Andromeda. Cornell repeatedly used this illustration of the constellation – originally published in Johannes Hevelius's 1690 *Firmamentum Sobiescianum sive Uranographia* – which pictures the celestial sphere as if seen from the outside, hence the sight of Andromeda's back.

Lines incised into the cloud-like texture of the interior wall recall a cartographic grid, on which the figure of Andromeda is balancing like an acrobat on a high wire. The freely hanging metal chain is a reference both to Andromeda's liberation and to gravity, the physical force that binds the universe together and holds the stars in their constellations.

Cornell followed closely the scientific advances of his day. In 1948 the new Mount Palomar Hale telescope became the world's largest optical telescope and by 1953 astronomers were training it upon the Andromeda galaxy, the farthest object from Earth visible to the naked eye. Cornell was highly aware that to see starlight is to look back in time.

UNTITLED (HOTEL  
FAMILY, PARMIGIANINO,  
BEL ANTEA VARIANT)

c. 1950  
Glass-paned wooden  
box, wooden strips,  
paint, photographic  
prints, book pages  
Houston, The Menil  
Collection

For Cornell, the image of the hotel epitomised the romance of travel, calling to mind *hôtels particuliers* – the lavish private mansions of eighteenth-century France – and the cosmopolitan lives of touring nineteenth-century ballerinas. The occupants of his Hotel works are sometimes birds, sometimes dancers, and sometimes characters taken from Old Master paintings. Cornell's love of historic typography is evident in his use of advertisements for European hotels, cut or copied from the numerous travel guides that he collected. In this work we encounter the ghostly presence of Parmigianino's »Antea« (c. 1531–34; Naples, Museo di Capodimonte). Cornell has carefully cropped the original image, discarding the subject's elaborately plaited hairstyle, earrings and lavish furs, leaving a timeless, anonymous face that hovers in an equally timeless space, framed by horizontal and vertical wooden battens and the shifting shadows they produce. During the 1950s he developed methods of building up layers of gesso and paint, and even baked boxes in the family's oven to enhance their textures. The resulting patinas powerfully summon melancholic spaces of past, faded glory, haunted by an absence made palpable.

UNTITLED  
(MULTIPLE CUBES)

1946–1948  
Glazed, wooden hinged  
cabinet with latch,  
wood, white paint  
Chicago, Robert  
H. Bergman

This work marks a departure from Cornell's earlier box constructions, its formal discipline and play with repetition anticipating Minimalist sculpture. The artist Sol LeWitt once commented: »Cornell was ahead of his time by using this sort of reductive approach. Nobody was doing that stuff then.« In making this work, Cornell was responding to a precedent, though not a sculptural one; around the same time, he noted in his diary: »Mondrian feeling strong«. He also described how he stacked the identical blocks up in a tower before placing them in the box, making a sort of ritual of their arrangement. Although Mondrian's pure abstract paintings stand apart from Cornell's involvement with objects and things, both artists shared the method of gradually refining their compositions through the act of placing materials and reviewing the results, Mondrian using squares and rectangles of paper and tape.

Cornell's work echoes the visual rhythms of New York's urban facades, and can also be read as a study in structure. The merest movement of the viewer in front of the work animates the extreme contrast between its bright white structures and dark shadows. The resulting optical interplay of volume, angle, tone and line focuses attention on the complex factors affecting depth perception.

OBSERVATORY:  
CORONA BOREALIS  
CASEMENT

1950  
Glazed wooden box,  
metal mesh, wooden  
components, white,  
blue and yellow paint,  
additional wooden  
compartment at back,  
two double-sided  
wooden panels  
Chicago, Robert H.  
Bergman

Cornell's series of Observatories further adapt the visual language of his »Aviaries« and »Hotels«. In this work hangs a solitary metal ring, the occupant having deserted the perch and flown off into a vast expanse. In its place, the viewer is invited to imaginatively inhabit this room: the architectural proportions of the opening recall a hotel balcony window, while the horizontal bars suggest a balustrade. The vertical slice of sky appears like the opening of a modern observatory dome, a suggestion echoed by the shape of the arch above. The wire mesh screen and the grid structures that line the walls evoke aerial views of Manhattan's blocks and the structures of skyscrapers, yet there is also something monastic about the restraint of the whitewashed cell and the contemplative atmosphere. On the reverse side of the box there is a compartment into which two reversible panels can be inserted to show vistas of blue, yellow or a sky chart of the constellation Corona Borealis, evoking the changing scenery experienced by a traveller.

## BLÉRIOT #2

c. 1956

Glazed wooden box,  
wooden components  
and metal spiral

By loan from the  
Buckingham family  
private collection

This box, one of the most minimal of Cornell's entire oeuvre, is a homage to the great French pilot, inventor and engineer Louis Blériot (1872–1936) who, in 1909, was the first person to make an engine-powered flight across the English Channel. His 36-minute journey in a flimsy wood-and-canvas aircraft of his own design won him £1,000 in prize money from the Daily Mail newspaper. The work illustrates an often overlooked aspect of Cornell's practice: his capacity for startling economy in his constructions. When the box is handled, the coiled metal spring at its centre gently quivers, suggesting the fragile balance of forces required for flight. With the lightest of touches, Cornell manages to evoke the spirit and achievement of Blériot. The pattern of the blue-stained wood grain allows us to imagine how the rippled surface of the sea might have appeared when seen from the air. Cornell made two versions of this work in the mid-1950s, just as the race between the United States and the former Soviet Union to put the first human into space was intensifying. Despite having himself never travelled, Cornell was nonetheless fascinated by notions of flight and exploration, as can be seen in a great many of his works.

## UNTITLED (»DOVE-COTE« AMERICAN GOTHIC)

c. 1954–56

Glass-paned stained  
wooden box, paint,  
wooden components,  
twenty-four wooden  
balls

The Robert Lehrman  
Art Trust, Courtesy  
of Aimee and Robert  
Lehrman

This work belongs to a series of pure white, abstract boxes, which Cornell referred to as »Dovecotes«. In this example, thirty arched compartments arranged in a grid provide homes for a collection of small wooden balls, standing in for doves. The balls are free to move around their compartments when the box is handled. Cornell assembled a large collection of materials – photographs, articles from magazines, postcards and other printed images – related to the history of dovecotes dating as far back as the Middle Ages, when they were built by knights and nobles to represent status and power. Cornell often spoke to visitors to his studio of his sadness at the decline of pigeon-keeping in New York: the practice had been brought to the city by Italian immigrants in the early twentieth century, but soon dwindled. As well as its literal representation of a dovecote, the geometric architecture of this box recalls the paintings that Piet Mondrian made while living in New York and nods to Cornell's influence on the generation of Minimalist artists that was soon to come to prominence in the United States.

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TOWARD THE BLUE  
PENINSULA: FOR  
EMILY DICKINSON

c. 1953  
Glass-paned wooden  
box, wooden dowel  
and components, wire  
mesh, paint, scraps of  
newspaper  
The Robert Lehrman  
Art Trust, Courtesy  
of Aimee and Robert  
Lehrman

This poetic box is dedicated to the American poet Emily Dickinson (1830–1886). Dickinson was a quiet, withdrawn and profoundly intellectual character, who always dressed in white. Cornell viewed her as something of a kindred spirit, despite the fact that she had died before he was born. Neither of them ever married, they never travelled far from home (despite both longing for distant places), and they both lived with their families. Cornell had known Dickinson's work since the 1920s, but became reacquainted with it during a period of intense research shortly before beginning work on this box. Having read dozens of books by and about Dickinson, he settled on a line from an 1862 poem for its title: »It might be easier to fail with Land in Sight – than gain My Blue Peninsula – to perish – of Delight.« The box resembles an abandoned aviary and is said to have been inspired by an image of the upstairs bedroom in the house where she did her writing. With the open window, which looks onto a bright blue sky, Cornell offers her an escape from what he described sympathetically in his diary as her »torturous seclusion«. In a similar way to his portrayal of Paolo and Francesca (object 60), Cornell makes an attempt to heal a deeply painful situation.

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GNIR REDNOW

Joseph Cornell and Stan  
Brakhage  
1955, 1960s  
16 mm film  
(Kodachrome), colour,  
silent, 6 minutes  
Courtesy of the Estate  
of Stan Brakhage

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CORNELL, 1965

Lawrence Jordan  
1965–1979  
16 mm film with sound,  
approx. 9 minutes  
Lawrence Jordan

Seen together, these two films shed light on Cornell's daily life and routines. The first of them, »Gnir Rednow«, was produced in 1955. Cornell commissioned Stan Brakhage, then an unknown young filmmaker, to document the Third Avenue Elevated Railway, shortly before it was dismantled. It was a route that Cornell had often travelled over the years. New York's elevated railways provided unusual urban perspectives; passengers could look down onto the streets below or directly across into the startlingly close windows of upper storeys. Brakhage met with Cornell to discuss the project, and subsequently received tickets and colour film in the post. He photographed and edited the film, entitled »The Wonder Ring«, in the early summer of 1955. The result was not what Cornell had expected – so he made his own version using footage that Brakhage had omitted, and inverted his title: »Gnir Redow«. The second film, titled »Cornell«, 1965, was shot on four rolls of Kodachrome 16 mm during the summer and autumn of that year by Cornell's then studio assistant, Lawrence Jordan. It contains brief glimpses of Cornell at work (the only known moving images of him) in the garden and basement studio at Utopia Parkway.

**CORNELL  
AND THE  
KUNSTKAMMER**

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Presented within the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the works of Joseph Cornell enter into fascinating conversations with all sorts of historical objects, from Renaissance paintings and the cabinet of coins and medals to Egyptian burial keepsakes. But it is with the museum's *Kunstammer* and its holdings of *mirabilia*, *naturalia*, *artificialia* and *scientifica* that this dialogue is most intense.

As well as being an artist, Cornell was also among the greatest collectors of the twentieth century. His works were made using the many thousands of small objects that he found in antiquarian bookshops, flea markets, dime stores or washed up on the beaches on Long Island; from marbles, seashells, bird's nests, curtain rings, watch parts and out-of-print books to a mass of paper ephemera including postage stamps, maps, prints, guidebooks, even shipping and train timetables. Part souvenir, part relic and part specimen, Cornell's works seem to record fictional expeditions around the world, playing with the language of museums and the systems of classification that underpin natural history.

Over more than forty years, he created his own, private cabinet of curiosities every bit as astonishing as those collected by the kings, emperors and aristocrats of Renaissance Europe. Like them, Cornell took pleasure in small things,

and the stories that they told. Like them, he sought to capture the world in a box, in an attempt to understand its workings and our place within it. And like them, he presented special objects as gifts to special people. The only difference was their material value. Cornell was not interested in costly or extravagant objects: his was a world of simple treasures, transformed into the most marvellous and precious of creations. He was, a friend once said, »the Benvenuto Cellini of flotsam and jetsam«.

For this reason, the final part of the exhibition »Joseph Cornell: Wanderlust« can be found within the *Kunstammer* itself, where a small group of Cornell's objects are temporarily on display.

To further underline and explore this affinity, visitors can follow a special path through the *Kunstammer* to see it through Cornell's eyes. In each of the main galleries, an historical object from the museum's collection has been singled out for its special resonance with Cornell's own work. Through them we learn more about Cornell's interests, and the extent to which they have preoccupied artists and craftsmen for many hundreds of years. Cornell never made it to Vienna, because he never once left the United States: but if he had, these are the objects that we think he might have liked.

## 76

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### UNTITLED (AVIARY WITH COCKATOO AND CORKS)

c. 1948

Wooden box with metal hinges and catch, panes of glass, paint, cut-out colour lithograph, string, driftwood, wooden divisions and objects, corks, paper boxes, music box parts  
Private collection

## 77

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### LE CAIRE

c. 1940

Prefabricated cylindrical paperboard box, paper collage, rolled-up paper scrolls, coloured cotton thread  
The Collection of Marguerite and Robert Hoffman

These four objects by Cornell have been installed apart from the rest of the exhibition, at the heart of the Kunsthistorisches Museum's remarkable *Kunstkammer*. Indicative of the different types of works that Cornell made, they reveal his true spirit: that of the collector, the natural historian, and the poet who transformed simple, everyday objects into little treasures. For the earliest work, »Untitled« (object 78), Cornell has taken a small, commercially manufactured pill box and filled it with two tiny spiralling objects: a patterned, iridescent seashell, and a metal spring. Beneath them, the printed image of a magnified cellular pattern points to the underlying structure of things, a constant fascination for Cornell. »Le Caire« (object 77) has the same, circular form, and is filled with rolls of tightly wound paper that recall the papyrus scrolls associated with Ancient Egypt and their hieroglyphic characters. Pasted onto the side of the box is a postage stamp with French and Arabic lettering. During the European colonisation of Africa in the nineteenth century, Egypt captured the imagination of many writers, composers and artists. It is this Egypt that appealed most to Cornell, who was a frequent visitor to the collections of New York's Metropolitan and Brooklyn Museums as well as Cleopatra's Needle in Central Park, a landmark linking the city with London and Paris.

## 78

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### UNTITLED

1933

Cylindrical paperboard box with paper collage, shell, ball bearing and metal springs  
New York, Mark Kelman

## 80

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### UNTITLED (MUSEUM)

c. 1940–50

Pre-existing wooden chest, glass bottles with wax seals and diverse contents including coloured sand, shells, feathers, beads, glass fragments, printed constellations, maps, architectural drawings  
The Robert Lehrman Art Trust, Courtesy of Aimee and Robert Lehrman

»Untitled (Museum)« further extends Cornell's interest in travel, collecting and classifying. Twenty-eight glass bottles, sealed with red wax, are arranged within a hinged wooden box. A cabinet of curiosities in miniature, they contain all manner of surprises from sand, feathers and shells to fragments of maps and architectural drawings. Part specimen, part relic, and part souvenir, they have been carefully selected so as to evoke other worlds, both real and imaginary. And finally, we come to the largest of the works, »Untitled (Aviary with Cockatoo and Corks)«, which resembles an historical automaton primed to burst into action at any moment. Housed within its lower central compartment are the operational parts of a music box, sealed behind glass and operated by a key in the reverse side of the box. The invocation of melody makes sense, for there are tales of cockatoos able to imitate whole arias. Cornell associated female singers with songbirds, and cockatoos in particular with the Italian soprano Giuditta Pasta. The exotic, the scientific, the natural and the artificial: the foundation stones of historical *Kunstkammern*, and also for the work of Joseph Cornell.



**LECTURES AND  
TALKS**

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Mon 2 November, 7pm\*  
Cupola Hall, KHM  
*Containing Wonder: Joseph Cornell's  
Cabinets of Curiosity*  
Dr. Kirsten Hoving  
In English

Thurs 5 November, 7pm\*  
Bassano Saal, KHM  
*The Enchanting Life of Joseph Cornell:  
An Illustrated Lecture*  
Deborah Solomon (biographer of  
Joseph Cornell)  
In English

Mon 16 November, 7pm\*\*  
Cupola Hall, KHM  
Roberta Smith and Jerry Saltz in conversation  
with Jasper Sharp  
Chief Art Critic, The New York Times, and  
Chief Art Critic, New York magazine  
In English

Tues 15 December, 7pm\*\*\*  
Cupola Hall  
Orhan Pamuk in conversation with  
Philipp Blom  
Novelist and recipient of the 2006 Nobel Prize  
for Literature

**KUNSTKONTEXT\***

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Tues 27 October and 17 November  
3:30pm  
Lecture room, KHM  
*Joseph Cornell: Überblick und Einblicke*  
Andreas Zimmermann  
In German

**CURATOR'S TOURS\***

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Tues 2 November  
Thurs 12 November  
Tues 24 November  
Thurs 3 December  
4pm  
Jasper Sharp  
In English

**GUIDED TOURS**

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Thurs 7pm in German  
(except Dec. 24 and 31)  
Sat/Sun at 11am and 3pm  
Duration c. 60 min.  
Meeting point: Entrance Hall  
In German  
Tickets € 3

\* Attendance is free with a valid entrance ticket,  
no reservation.

\*\* Attendance is free, please register at  
talks@khm.at.

\*\*\* Attendance is free, please register at  
pamuk@khm.at.

## FILMS\*

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Two evenings with films by Joseph Cornell

Wed 11 November, 8:30pm

Introduction: Naoko Kaltschmidt

Thurs 12 November, 8:30pm

Introduction: Jasper Sharp &

Alexander Horwath

Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Albertinaplatz

Tickets and reservation T +43 1 533 70 54 or  
office@filmmuseum.at

Box office opens at 5:30pm

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6 – 12 years old

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## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

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20 October, 2015 – 10 January, 2016

Tue – Sun 10am – 6pm

Thurs 10am – 9pm

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## GREETINGS FROM THE KUNSTHISTO- RISCHES MUSEUM

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We will post this postcard for you to an EU  
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Cover: Joseph Cornell, Untitled (Pinturicchio Boy), 1942–52, Glenstone //

Cover inside: Joseph Cornell, Habitat Group for a Shooting Gallery, 1943,

Des Moines Art Center, Iowa // Both: © The Joseph and Robert

Cornell Memorial Foundation, Bildrecht, Wien, 2015

**EDITOR**

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Dr Sabine Haag, Director General  
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