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The Importance of Biodiversity for Inspiration

- Collecting is a tradition that dates back at least to the Renaissance, when, spurred on by the great voyagers and navigators, collectors created curio rooms in which fauna, flora, minerals, fossils, skulls, shells, and insects were classified and arranged. (Kerchache et al, 2000)
- Man's early ancestors - French cave paintings at Lascaux, about 17,000 years ago. (Culture Ministry, 2008) They were evidently inspired by the horse.
- Chimu and Inca pottery, found in Peru depicts early potatoes, (200-800 AD), with human features, disfigured by ritual sacrifice. Dependence on a single, delicate staple food plant resulted in extremes of cultural behaviour. (Salaman, 1945)
- Durer's Rhinoceros – 1515 (British Museum, 2006) was a major marketing inspiration for the new printing industry of the time. Later Arcimboldo, (1527-1593), and others depicted animals “lost” in Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire, as they were rediscovered in the Renaissance.
- Arcimboldo, like Leonardo da Vinci before him, was inspired by all life- see his many depictions of people as plants, and other life forms.(Kriegeskorte, 1987)
- Arthropods can inspire! German designer Till Nowak has created a masterpiece “Salad”, a fantastic digital image of Alien made out of vegetables. It is his tribute to HR Giger and Giuseppe Arcimboldo (Laughing Squid, 2007).
- Victorians such as Joseph Hooker, plundered the world for orchids and other plants, while lamenting “the loss of habitat to the axe and the plough”. Plant, bird and insect collectors were often also artists (Mabey, 1988).
- Many museums only show botanical works on request, and rarely allow browsing. Until this year, when the Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art was opened at Kew, there was no London (or other!) gallery where both old and new botanical paintings could be easily viewed. “Through art ... people will understand our dependence upon plant life.” Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*) were introduced to Europe by the early 17th Century, and have been a popular an inspiring motif in art ever since.(Sherwood, 2008)

Inspiration is expressed in so many other ways -

- Literature and Poetry
Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner – 1797-8 – tells how our fate may depend on the life of a sea-bird – a superstition or an allegory? “For all averred, I had killed the bird / That made the breeze to blow.” (Coleridge, 1798).
Goethe – German poet was an inspired botanic explorer and illustrator in the early 19th Century (Backyard Nature, 2008).
- Edward Lear, famous for nonsense limericks, was a prolific illustrator of birds. (ANSP, 2008)

What is not discussed here.

- Australian Aboriginal X-ray paintings,
- Children's book illustrators,
- Dance – primitive emulation of animals?
- Music – emulating birds?

In conclusion, as Claude Levi-Strauss rightly observed:

- "A bird, a beetle, a butterfly invite the same rapt contemplation that we reserve for a Tintoretto or a Rembrandt". (Kerchache et al, 2000)

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