

# HOW SPECIMENS CHANGE FROM *CURIOSITIES* TO SCIENTIFIC COLLECTIONS

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(AND OTHER  
STORIES FROM A  
400-YEAR-OLD  
NATURAL HISTORY  
MUSEUM)

Natural history museums occupy a unique space in the world of museology, often facing challenges from both a humanities and scientific perspective. Much of their controversy stems from the very fact that the primary “items” stored and displayed in these museums were once living organisms. Because most natural history museums are associated with large research collections and universities, they often house thousands (if not millions) of specimens. Tasked with the burden of accurately representing biodiversity, history, climate, evolution, and humanity’s role in all of these, natural history collections are continuously undergoing physical and organizational changes to meet these ever-changing fields.

However, the wealth of knowledge and recent advances in museum-based scientific techniques (CT-scanning, museomics, etc.) provide a world of inspiring and innovative new ways to use these collections. These methods are especially important when examining historically-significant and rare museum specimens, as each organism in these collections represent a unique snapshot of a place and time that cannot be replicated.

In this talk, I will use the Natural History Museum of Denmark as a case study to discuss these issues from both a historic and modern perspective, starting from its early origins as one of Europe’s first *Kunstkammer* (“Cabinet of Curiosities”) to its current role as a leading research institute in Europe. Along the way, I will also share a series of anecdotes about the bizarre and surprising adventures that come with working in an early zoological collection.



**12 -1 pm**  
**Friday, January 24, 2025**  
**Hatcher Library**  
**Gallery Lab**  
**Room 100H**

**MUSEUMS** @ NOON



**MUSEUM STUDIES**

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