



# NATIONAL MUSEUM *of* WOMEN *in the* ARTS

## **Maria Sibylla Merian Papers, 1647–1717**

### **Biography**

#### **Patricia Kleps-Hok**

Patricia Kleps-Hok is a founder of the Davis Art Center in Davis, CA and on the Board of Directors for the Helene Strybing Arboretum and Botanical Gardens in San Francisco. In addition, she worked in the publications office of the College of Home Economics at Cornell University. Art and botany are two subjects in which she has long been interested and found a combination of both in the works of Maria Sibylla Merian, whom she first discovered in 1973 while visiting Heidelberg, Germany. Fascinated by both the fact that Merian was born in 1647 and she had visited America in 1699, Kleps-Hok began to research the artist. She even took German lessons to translate material on Merian since there was very little printed about her in English. The anonymity of Merian convinced Kleps-Hok that the modern world should learn more about her.

#### **Maria Sibylla Merian**

Besides creating visual images of great beauty, Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717) made observations that revolutionized both botany and zoology. This extraordinary artist-scientist was born in Frankfurt. Her father, Matthäus Merian the Elder, was a Swiss printmaker and publisher who died when she was three. One year later her mother married Jacob Marell, a Flemish flower painter and one of Merian's first teachers.

From early childhood, Merian was interested in drawing the animals and plants she saw around her. In 1670, five years after her marriage to the painter Johann Andreas Graff, the family moved to Nuremberg, where Merian published her first illustrated books. In preparation for a catalogue of European moths, butterflies, and other insects, Merian collected, raised, and observed the living insects, rather than working from preserved specimens, as was the norm.

In 1685 Merian left Nuremberg and her husband, from whom she was later divorced, to live with her two daughters and her widowed mother in the Dutch province of West Friesland. After her mother's death, Merian returned to Amsterdam. Eight years later, at the age of 52, Merian took the astonishing step of embarking-with her younger daughter, but no male companion-on a dangerous, three-month trip to the Dutch colony of Surinam, in South America, having received a grant from the City Fathers of Amsterdam. Having seen some of the dried specimens of animals and plants that were popular with European collectors, Merian wanted to study them within their natural habitat. She spent the next two years studying and drawing the indigenous flora and fauna. Forced home by malaria, Merian published her most significant book in 1705. The lavishly illustrated *Metamorphosis of the Insects of Surinam* established her international reputation. A second, posthumous, edition was published under the title *Dissertation in Insect Generations and Metamorphosis in Surinam*.

She was the first published woman naturalist and became so respected and well known that many eminent collectors, including Peter the Great, bought her work. Merian died on January 13, 1717 possibly from a stroke.

## **Chronology**

No chronology listed.

## **Scope and Content**

The Kleps-Hok Collection on Maria Sibylla Merian consists of two boxes of material, which includes biographical & bibliographical information, correspondence, notes, and photographs. These items relate to Merian's artistic life and Kleps-Hok's search for information. They are arranged by medium within the boxes.

The biographical files series is the largest, containing fourteen folders of information, dating from c 1650 to 1993. This section not only includes Kleps-Hok's manuscript entitled, *Search for Sibylla: The 17<sup>th</sup> Century's Woman of Today*, but also copies of German text from books (some have English translations) regarding Merian found during Kleps-Hok's research period.

The correspondence series consists of information dating from 1682 to 1979, including copies of sections of letters by Merian to her daughter, translations from the letters, and also letters regarding Kleps-Hok's interest in Merian.

The notes series consists of material on Merian and the author's notes on Merian's books and correspondence. Also, this section includes translations of Merian's *Caterpillar Book: The Wonderful Metamorphosis and the Special Flower Sustenance of the Caterpillar* and *Neues Blumenbuch*.

There are only two photographs in the photograph series: one is a reproduction of the genealogical tree of Merian and the other is a Merian family portrait. Another series is photocopies of excerpts from Merian's books *Caterpillar Book: The Wonderful Metamorphosis and the Special Flower Sustenance of the Caterpillar* and *Neues Blumenbuch*.

There is also a lithographs/facsimile series containing facsimiles of Frankfurt, Germany (Merian's birthplace) and a castle in Heidelberg, German and the lithograph is of Nuremberg, German where Merian lived for a time.

Two miscellaneous items are also included in this collection: a bibliography, consisting of three pages from the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, and microfilm of part of Merian's book, *Caterpillar Book: The Wonderful Metamorphosis and the Special Flower Sustenance of the Caterpillar*- (Photocopies of the same pages can also be found previously in the collection.)

The collection is divided into eight series:

- Series I: Biographical Files, c. 1650-1675, 1835-1839, 1909-1993
- Series II: Bibliography, n.d.
- Series III: Correspondence, 1682-1705, 1975-1979
- Series IV: Excerpts, 1679-1680
- Series V: Lithograph/Facsimiles, c. 1620 and 1716
- Series VI: Microfilm, 1679
- Series VII: Notes, n.d.
- Series VIII: Photographs, 1945

## Provenance

The Kleps-Hok Collection on Maria Sibylla Merian was donated in 1994 by Patricia Kleps-Hok to the National Museum of Women in the Arts. The details of the gift are noted in the correspondence between Kleps-Hok and the Museum and in a preliminary inventory from March 1994. The collection was sorted by medium, and a final inventory was prepared in October 1997.

## Series Descriptions

### Series I: Biographical Files, c. 1650-1675, 1835-1839, 1909-1993

The biographical files series is the largest, containing fourteen folders of information, dating from c. 1650 to 1993. This section not only includes Kleps-Hok's manuscript entitled, *Search for Sibylla: The 17<sup>th</sup> Century's Woman of Today*, but also copies of German text from books (some have English translations) regarding Merian found during Kleps-Hok's research period.

### Series II: Bibliography, n.d.

This series consists of three pages from the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg which contain a bibliography on Merian.

### Series III: Correspondence, 1682-1705, 1975-1979

The correspondence series consists of information dating from 1682 to 1979, including copies of sections of letters by Merian to her daughter, translations from the letters, and also letters regarding Kleps-Hok's interest in Merian.

### Series IV: Excerpts, 1679-1680

This series contains excerpts from Maria Sibylla Merian's *Caterpillar Book: The Wonderful Metamorphosis and the Special Flower Sustenance of the Caterpillar* and *Neues Blumenbuch*

### Series V: Lithograph/Facsimiles, c. 1620 and 1716

This series contains facsimiles of Frankfurt, Germany (Merian's birthplace) and a castle in Heidelberg, German and the lithograph is of Nuremberg, Germany where Merian lived for a time.

### Series VI: Microfilm, 1679

This series contains microfilm of part of Merian's book, *Caterpillar Book: The Wonderful Metamorphosis and the Special Flower Sustenance of the Caterpillar*.

### Series VII: Notes, n.d.

This series consists of material on Merian and the author's notes on Merian's books and correspondence. Also, this section includes translations of Merian's *Caterpillar Book: The Wonderful Metamorphosis and the Special Flower Sustenance of the Caterpillar* and *Neues Blumenbuch*.

### Series VIII: Photographs, 1945

The last series contains photographs of Merian's genealogical tree and a family portrait.

## Processing

In 1997, Karen Ho processed the collection. The collection is housed in 32 folders within two archival boxes in the Library and Research Center at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. A final inventory was taken and a finding aid written by Karen Ho in October 1997.

## Related Materials

The Archives on Women Artists in the Library and Research Center maintains a vertical file on Maria Sibylla Merian, which includes articles and other secondary research material. The Library and Research Center at the National Museum of Women in the Arts owns many books by and about Merian. The National Museum of Women in the Arts also owns original works by Merian in its permanent collection.

## Box Inventory

### **SERIES I: BIOGRAPHICAL FILES**

#### **Box 1**

Photocopied Text from Una Birch's *Anna Van Schurman: Artist, Scholar, Saint*.

Forward from Patricia Kleps-Hok's manuscript *Search for Sibylla*

Patricia Kleps-Hok's manuscript *Search fro Sibylla*

Photocopied text from Matthaus Merian Jr.'s *Autobiography of Matthaus Merian*

English Translation of Matthaus Merian Jr.'s *Autobiography of Matthaus Merian*

Photocopied text from George Kaspar Nagler's *Neues Allgemeines Kunstler Lexikon*

English translation of George Kaspar Nagler's *Neues Allgemeines Kunstler*

*Lexikon*

Photocopied text from Claus Nissen's *Die Botanische Buchillustration ihre Geschichte und Bibliographie*

Photocopied text by Elisabeth Rucker from exhibition catalogue *Maria Sibylla Merian, 1647-1717*

English translation of Elisabeth Rucker's *Maria Sibylla Merian, 1647-1717*

Photocopied text by Elisabeth Rucker, *Maria Sibylla Merian*

English translation of text by Elisabeth Rucker, *Maria Sibylla Merian*

Photocopied text from Ulrich Thiene and Felix Becker's *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Kunstler von der Antike bis dur Gegenwart*

Photocopied text from Joachim von Sandrart's *Deutsche Akademie der Edlen Bau-Bild-und Mahlerey-Kunste*

## **SERIES II: BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Box 1**

Bibliography on Maria Sibylla Merian

## **SERIES III: CORRESPONDENCE**

### **Box 1**

To/From: Patricia Kleps-Hok. Concerning her interest in Merian  
Maria Sibylla Merian- Published German text  
English translation of Merian's letters from Folder 17.

## **SERIES IV: EXCERPTS**

### **Box 2**

Excerpts from Maria Sibylla Merian's *Caterpillar Book: The Wonderful  
Metamorphosis and the Special Flower Sustenance of the Caterpillar*  
Excerpts from Maria Sibylla Merian's *Neues Blumenbuch*

## **SERIES V: LITHOGRAPH/FACSIMILES**

### **Box 2**

Facsimile of Frankfurt on the Main, Germany, by Matthaus Merian the Elder  
Facsimile of a castle at Heidelberg, Germany. Castle of Frederick, Regent of  
Bohemia, the Palentine Elector  
Lithograph of Nuremberg, Germany, by I.A. Delfenbach. Color

## **SERIES VI: MICROFILM**

### **Box 2**

Microfilm of Maria Sibylla Merian's *Caterpillar Book: The Wonderful  
Metamorphosis  
and the Special Flower Sustenance of the Caterpillar*

## **SERIES VII: NOTES**

### **Box 1**

Kleps-Hok's notes on Merian's *Butterflies, Beetles, and Other Insects: the  
Leningrad Book of Notes and Studies*  
Miscellaneous Research Notes

Patricia Kleps-Hok's notes on Merian's correspondence  
Kleps-Hok's translation notes  
English translation from Maria Sibylla Merian's *Caterpillar Book: The Wonderful Metamorphosis and the Special Flower Sustenance of the Caterpillar*  
English translation from Maria Sibylla Merian's *Neues Blumenbuch*, 1680

## **SERIES VIII: PHOTOGRAPHS**

### **Box 1**

Maria Sibylla Merian's genealogical tree from J. Stuldreher-Nienhaus's *Verborgten Paradizen*  
Merian family portrait from J. Stuldreher-Nienhaus's *Verborgten Paradizen*