

*Text by Federico Fauli*

The question about the origin and evolution of museums as institutions is a common inquiry. During the European Renaissance, the *"Cabinets of curiosities"* represented the precursors of modern museums. The exhibition **"Cabinets of Ether"** aims to highlight the complexity of the current digital era, characterized by fragmentation and the frenetic accumulation of objects and images.

This cultural phenomenon generates its beauty through a unique language that feeds on the hybridization of continuous contaminating elements. As we navigate daily issues with a *"like"* or a *"tweet"*, we are exposed to a surplus of new images, pictograms, and symbols that influence and transform our way of communicating.

The *"Cabinets of curiosities"* were not just collections aimed at showcasing the eccentricities of their curators, but they were true social tools aimed at establishing and maintaining their status within society. These places were based on the concept of *"learned entertainment"* or the synergy between learning and entertainment, with the goal of eliciting wonder in observers.

The history of art has deep and fascinating roots that date back to the origin of the practice of collecting in the Italian Renaissance *"Cabinets of curiosities"*. Understanding why the aristocracy loved to collect rare objects and understanding the social role they played can explain many of the enigmatic facets of the emergence of new art markets. Each object offered the opportunity to tell a story or, more often, to create one. Like the wealthiest individuals, collectors of the past loved to define their personalities through the possession of opulent objects, tangible signs of their intelligence, erudition, wealth, and taste.

They had already understood that precious objects exerted a powerful influence on people and that associations between luxury items and personality left lasting impressions. However, it is important to note that these environments were not always based on reality. They were not conceived as scientific entities but rather as places of imagination, where those who had the necessary resources constructed their own worldview. Being at the center of this microcosm and pointing out objects to reveal their deepest secrets gave collectors a sense of comfort and mastery in a world often perceived as too vast, confusing, and inhospitable.

The opulence of the *"Cabinets of curiosities"* was often entirely random, devoid of any chronological order or scientific criteria guiding the arrangement of objects. The collector had full control over interpretation and content, which actually reflected their taste and identity. Therefore, an inevitable question arises: is there a substantial difference between the great collectors of a past era and the so-called *"Whales"* of Web3, the major collectors of Digital Works? Is it possible to establish a relationship between the ancient practice of collecting as a symbol of social status and the contemporary action of accumulating extensive collections of NFTs? The exhibition aims to outline the complex relationships between the *"Cabinets of curiosities"* and the new digital art markets, focusing on the act of collecting as a tool of pride and celebration, embodied in unique and valuable objects.

NFTs represent a relatively recent phenomenon made possible by blockchain technology, unique digital tokens representing ownership of a particular digital asset.

By delving into the fascinating world of NFTs, the exhibition highlights their ability to create rarity and uniqueness in a digital world where reproduction and sharing of content are common practices.



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Both post-medieval collections and NFTs are oriented towards the exhibition and collection of unique and valuable objects. In conclusion, NFTs have the potential to verify ownership of physical artworks and offer access to exclusive digital versions. Exploring the exhibition, visitors will be immersed in a world of imagination and wonder, in an experience reminiscent of the ancient "Cabinet of curiosities". They will witness a fusion of past and present, where Phygital will take center stage, inspiring the same awe as historical collections and the rarity and uniqueness of NFTs. The exhibition aims to celebrate the art of collecting as an ode to imagination, hoping that every visitor can enjoy this experience and gain a deeper understanding of the art of collecting, both past and present.

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