

Blaschka Glass Models at the Grant Museum

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The Grant Museum of Zoology

The Grant Museum of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy was founded in 1827 to serve as the teaching collection for the newly established University of London (now UCL). The Museum's founder Robert Edmond Grant (above) build this "Zootomical Museum" from scratch and by the time of his death it contained over 10,000 specimens. Later curators, including E. Ray Lankester, Walter Weldon and D.M.S. Watson, continued to develop the collection, which expanded still further when the Zoological Collection from Imperial College London was incorporated into the Museum.

The Grant Museum contains 33 individual Blaschka glass models in 28 preparations. These models are exclusively of invertebrates and the species are contained in a catalogue from 1875. The species represented include Echinodermata, Mollusca, Cnidaria and a platyhelminth.

Conservation

As part of a lively teaching collection, the Blaschka glass models came in for a great deal of wear and tear over the years. However, in 2004, thanks to a generous grant from the UCL Friends Trust, the Museum was able to undertake a much needed programme of restoration work on the models. This work was done by Bouke de Vries, an experienced ceramics and glass conservator.

The specimens were cleaned of all old adhesive and then parts of the specimens which had become detached were re-bonded. For the most part re-bonding of the specimens was done using Paraloid B72, although metal tentacles were reattached using a silicone adhesive. Where the glass domes encasing the specimens needed repair Fynebond epoxy resin was used for bonding and filling.



The Blaschka Models Today

To support the growing demands of an increasing audience, the Grant Museum recently installed new interpretation. Previously impenetrable scientific labelling gave way to more informative signage. As part of this our Blaschka model case was reinterpreted. New Museum fact-files, audio-guide and case labels all inform the visitor of the significance and history of these beautiful pieces. Artists take them as a source of inspiration and researchers and students can refer to them in just the spirit in which they would have been used from their creation.



The Grant Museum Blaschkas

Twenty of our models appear in an 1890 printed Museum catalogue compiled by E. Ray Lankester which suggests that they were ordered by Lankester to fulfil his teaching needs at that time. Entries in the accession register suggest that the models were ordered in 1888, although the Museum reports from the time state only that models of various anemones were purchased.

The remaining models entered the collection from the Science Museum at a later date when it deaccessioned its glass model collection between 1925 and 1927. These models were originally ordered in 1877 but, when the use and display of glass models went out of fashion, the models were transferred to University College London and six other institutions.

