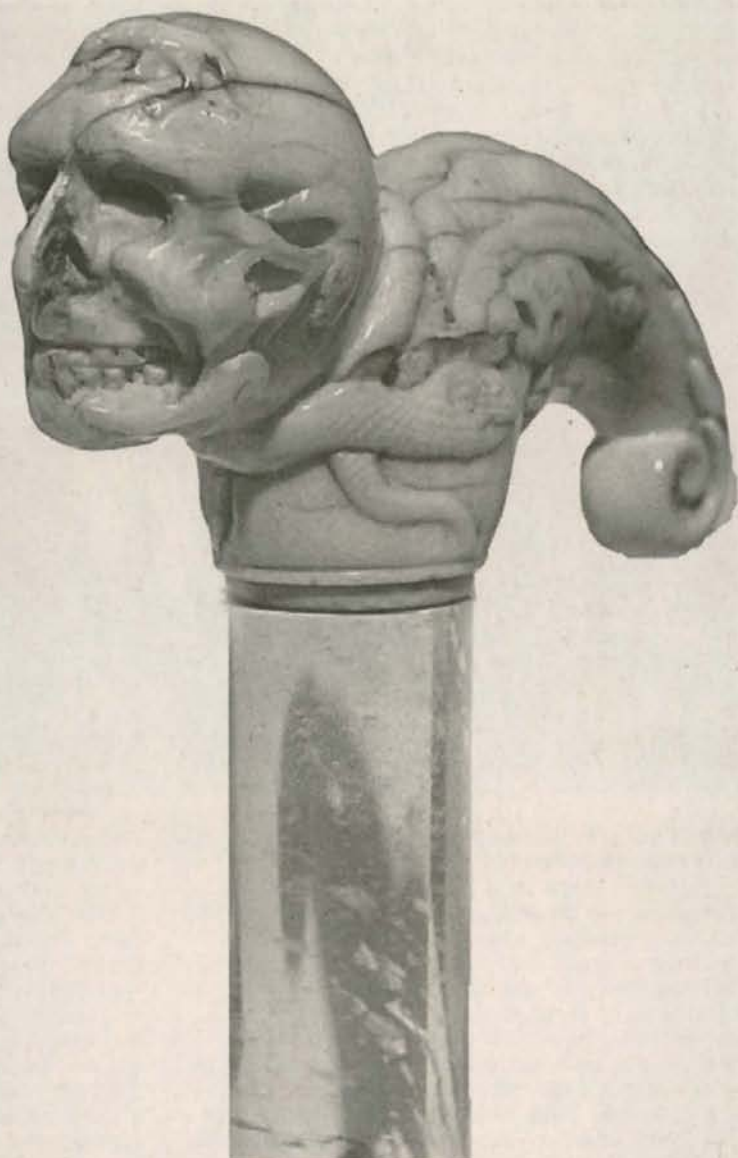


THE LISTINGS



Peter Freeman Inc.

'A COLLECTOR'S CABINET OF CURIOSITIES: OBJECTS FOR A WUNDERKAMMER FROM 16TH TO 19TH CENTURY' If the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Princely Splendor: The Dresden Court: 1580-1620" made you lust for a wunderkammer — wonder cabinet — to call your own, or simply desire a deeper familiarity with the subject, proceed forthwith to the Peter Freeman Gallery in SoHo. There, on the occasion of the Met's lavish survey of natural and man-made booty accumulated by successive electors of Saxony, Georg Laue, a dealer and amber expert from Munich, has mounted a dense display of more than 100 small, exquisite wunderkammer objects dating from the 16th to the 19th century. The show feels like a somewhat oppressive living room, thanks to the intimate size of the gallery and the relative absence of Plexiglas and the use of small exquisitely crafted cabinets for some displays. Nearly everything on view is a kind of marvel, usually one that combines an exotic and beautiful natural material with a triumph of human skill. This applies to several chalices and tankards and one small monument carved from serpentine or rock crystal, a silver-mounted emu egg and a small box made of blocks of amber, as well as a beautiful Asmat ancestor skull, decorated with seeds, feathers and shell; three bronzes of tiny lizards cast from life; and a model boat from the Spice Islands (Indonesia) made entirely of dried cloves. Also arresting are several tiny carved ivories of double-sided heads in which living faces alternate in different ways with vermin-infested skulls. These objects, one of which is a cane handle, above, manifest a theme that haunts the wunderkammer: *vanitas*, or the fleeting nature of life and the inevitability of death, against which all collecting is an unusually materialistic form of resistance. (Peter Freeman Inc., 560 Broadway, at Prince Street, SoHo, (212) 966-5154, through Jan. 29; free.)

ROBERTA SMITH