

## **Introduction to Special Section**

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The articles in this special section are the result of the research work of Honours and Master's students who took the advanced seminar *Cultures of the Past: Art History and Memory* in the Fall of 2022. The main assignment in this seminar was the production of catalogue entries on antique collectibles, dating from the 3rd to 19th century CE and found in private Winnipeg collections, in preparation for the exhibition of two 'Cabinets of Curiosities' in the hall of the Department of History between November 28 and December 14, 2022. Thirty-six artefacts were selected, researched, documented, and installed in the showcases of the Department of History by the students themselves, who completed their assignments with a guided tour of the exhibition where they had a chance to share their finds with the group.

Several artistic mediums and historical periods were represented, from metal objects such as Roman votive mirrors and late-medieval pilgrim badges, to parchment paintings, engravings, molded glass objects, and stained glass, to name only some. Students were encouraged to turn their essays into articles and submit them to journals. The editorial board of *Crossings* was immediately enthusiastic about publishing students' papers on topics that were unusual for the University of Winnipeg.

Three texts were submitted by the students to the editorial board: Danijela Sarić looked at religious and satirical pilgrim badges produced in Northern Europe between the 15th and 16th centuries,

Emma Dubeski studied woodcut prints produced by German artist Hans Weiditz for a late-16th century illustrated edition of Petrarch's *Remedies for Fortunes* (*De remediis utriusque fortunae*), while Caley Dyck researched four glass salt cellars with reverse painted portraits, a type of commemorative object that was produced in large numbers in Bohemia at the end of the 18th century.

Despite the good state of conservation of those artefacts, their study is hampered by the fact that they are not what art historians or art dealers would refer to as 'fine art.' As their prime function was utilitarian (whether educational, cultic, or otherwise) and they were not made of luxurious materials such as gold or silver, enamels or ivory, for wealthy patrons who usually kept records of their valuable objects, they came to be regarded as singular objects, or 'folk art.' Therefore, historians have underestimated their value. This explains why such objects have not drawn as much interest from scholars as precious artistic objects have. Despite the scarcity of publications on such antique collectibles, Caley, Danijela, and Emma were able to constitute a good corpus of documentation, which helped them to better understand and interpret the function and meaning of their objects. They tried to establish their origins and provenance, analyzed their artefacts in their physicality (techniques, materials, finishing, forms, dimensions, deterioration/corrosion, etc.), and interpreted their subjects and symbolism (iconography and iconology) with confidence, as they endeavoured to cast a new light on objects that have never been studied before. That makes their achievements all the more remarkable. I'm convinced that these articles will hold the interest of readers, and perhaps even give them a taste for starting their own collections of antiques.