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# Compendium

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Martina Copley, Exhibition Curator, 2003

**Like the miniature world of the encyclopaedia, where the arbitrary order of alphabetisation replaces the seemingly determined disorder of history, this collection... exists in a time particular to its own boundaries.<sup>1</sup>**

From the shrine to the shop window, *Compendium* presents the fiction of a collection – an eclectic and inventive assemblage of aging objects or stolen prizes made by sixty artists from discarded medallion cases. Exhibiting the fascination of the collection as an image of a finite reflected world, *Compendium* creates a space in which memory, materiality and imagination are systematically linked... A timepiece of sorts; an indoor monument – temporary and titled – in which the ever-present instability of order and accumulation is balanced.

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model, microcosm, memorial, monument, miniature... The museum is the central metaphor for the collection which replaces history with classification – with order beyond the realm of temporality. Moving between display and hiding, identity and difference, the space of the collection is determined by system and by the structural boundaries of the box and the seriality of shelves. In this hermetic world – a system of systems – objects are secreted, afforded special status, isolated and offered up for looking in a reformulated visibility. And within this fiction of an official story, individual boxes suggest their own particular histories.

Handy valises for travelling art from the quotidian to the fantastic – the hinged medallion boxes create miniature, theatrical display spaces that open out into an encyclopaedic second-order world. Just as in the Wunderkammern collections of the Late Renaissance – marvellous precursors to the modern museum – the Carnavalesque spirit of creativity also aspires to usurp the authoritative architecture of this collection. The wonderfully inventive and eclectic approaches to the boxes both dissemble and iterate the closed scheme of knowledge suggested by the installation. The self-referential nature of the articulated structure and the

imponderable elements of poetry and laughter become one and the same thing, to create a totality that is potential, conjectural and manifold.

The man with the magnifying glass... is a fresh eye before a new object... It gives him back the enlarging gaze of a child. With his glass in his hand he returns to the garden... the miniscule, a narrow gate opens up an entire world.<sup>2</sup>

*Compendium* describes a nebulous cosmos of imagined places and maps, an archaeology of elegiac portraits and memorials, an inventory of talismans and grotesqueries, an accumulation of trophies and ephemera... a microcosm of all possible worlds.

This parenthetical list – a model form of art object – was initially housed within the public display cases in the Spencer Street Underpass at Platform in March 2003 – and is represented in the museum habitat at the Icon Museum of Art, Deakin University, February 2004.

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1. Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1993.  
2. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Orion Press, 1968, p.155.