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THE ART AND SCIENCE OF ERNST HAECKEL

Rainer Willmann, Julia Voss

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## THE ART AND SCIENCE OF ERNST HAECKEL

### Microbial marvels

**Ernst Haeckel, the 19th-century pioneer who captured the artistic beauty of the natural world**

**Ernst Haeckel** (1834–1919) was a German-born biologist, naturalist, evolutionist, artist, philosopher, and doctor, who **spent his life researching flora and fauna from the highest mountaintops to deepest ocean**. A vociferous supporter and developer of Darwin's theories of evolution, he denounced religious dogma, abandoned an early career in medicine, authored philosophical treatises, gained a doctorate in zoology, and coined scientific terms which have passed into common usage, including ecology, phylum, and stem cell.

Haeckel's colossal legacy has fascinated, confounded, and polarized generations. But what was at the heart of his extraordinary life's work? Rather like his intellectual forebear, Alexander von Humboldt, Haeckel was motivated not only to discover but also to explain. To do this, he created **hundreds of detailed drawings, watercolors, and sketches** of his findings which he published in successive volumes during the 20th century, including several marine organism collections and the majestic *Kunstformen der Natur* (Art Forms in Nature), which could serve as the cornerstone of Haeckel's entire life project.

Like **a meticulous visual encyclopedia of living things**, Haeckel's work was as remarkable for its graphic precision and meticulous shading as for its understanding of organic evolution and cellular development. From bats to the box jellyfish, lizards to lichen, and spider legs to sea anemones, he **emphasized the essential symmetries and order of nature, and found biological beauty in even the most unlikely of creatures**. The prints not only furthered the study of natural history but also influenced generations of 20th-century artists and architects, from the emerging proponents of Art Nouveau to architects such as Hendrik Petrus Berlage, whose Amsterdam Commodities Exchange was inspired by Haeckel's illustrations.

In this book, we celebrate the **scientific, artistic, and environmental importance** of Haeckel's work, with a collection of prints from several of his most important tomes on marine biology, including *Die Radiolarien*, *Monographie der Medusen*, *Die Kalkschwämme: eine Monographie*, and *Kunstformen der Natur*. At a time when biodiversity is increasingly threatened by human activities, the book is at once a visual masterwork, an underwater exploration, and a **vivid reminder of the precious variety of life**.

*"Nature generates an inexhaustible cornucopia of wonderful forms, the beauty and variety of which far exceed the crafted art forms produced by human beings."*— *Ernst Haeckel*

### The authors:

**Rainer Willmann** holds a chair in zoology at Göttingen University, is director of its Zoological Museum, and is cofounder of its Centre for Biodiversity and Ecology Research. A specialist in phylogenetics and evolution, he conducts research into biodiversity and its history.

**Julia Voss** studied German literature, art history, and philosophy at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität in Freiburg, at the Humboldt-Universität in Berlin, and at Goldsmith's College in London. Her doctoral dissertation on visual representations of Darwinian evolution theory received the Otto Hahn Medal from the Max Planck Society. She is Deputy Editor of the Feuilleton and co-Editor of the Fine Arts section for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

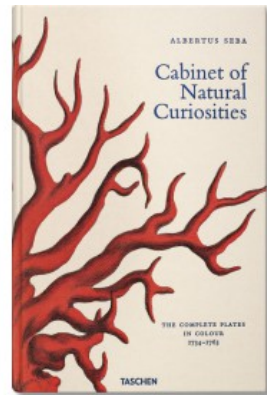
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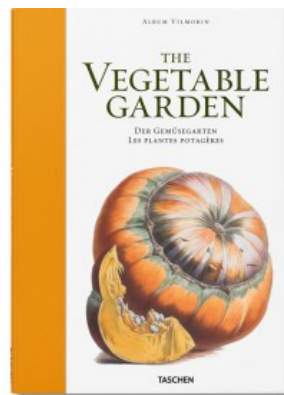


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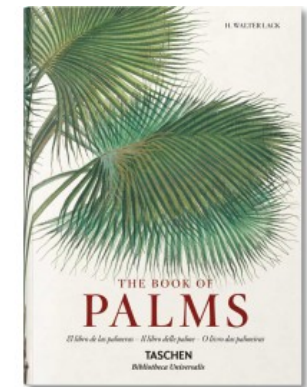
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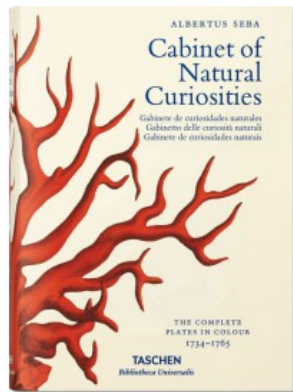
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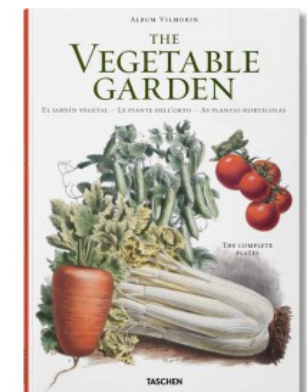
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