

Maria Merian

World-Travelling Entomologist

Learning Leaflet: Women in Science
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Maria Sybilla Merian, *Erucarum ortus* ("The Caterpillar Garden"; Amsterdam, 1717)

Exhibit: Galileo's World | Gallery: The Scientific Revolution | No.: 9

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How do art and travel benefit natural history?



Maria Merian: World-Travelling Entomologist

Maria Merian (1647-1717), skilled in both art and natural history, studied the relationships between flowers and insects. She conducted research in gardens and museums, produced detailed sketches and beautiful paintings, and even bred insects to aid in her entomological investigations.

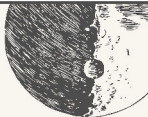

Countering widespread belief in the spontaneous generation of insects, Merian produced detailed accounts of the process of metamorphosis in butterflies and moths.

To further her research, the citizens of Amsterdam sponsored Merian's expedition to Suriname, a Dutch colony in South America, accompanied by her daughter Dorothea. In Suriname, Merian recorded indigenous names of plants, studied the life cycles of caterpillars and butterflies, and observed many insects including the leaf-cutter ant and a large spider that had captured a bird.

This Latin work, published by Dorothea after her mother's death, was also published in German, French and Dutch.

Kerry Magruder



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