

PRESS RELEASE
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SB Museum of Natural History Opens Up its Drawers

New Maximus Gallery Exhibit Showcases Curators & Behind-the-Scenes Collections

- Exhibit Open Wed–Sun, 10:00 AM–5:00 PM through March 31, 2022
- Included in Museum admission
- More information at sbnature.org/drawers

SANTA BARBARA, CA— Don't be fooled: this Maximus Gallery exhibit's cheeky title belies its substance. *What's in Our Drawers* reveals what's hidden in the Museum's Collections and Research Center: not only the kinds of objects preserved there, but the people who care for them.

"I hope that people take away more of a personal connection with the Museum when they see all these people behind the scenes," says Gallery Curator Linda Miller. She and Maximus Exhibit Designer Marian McKenzie coordinated with 14 current and emeritus staff to display a wide variety of specimens and artifacts based on the scientists' own personal criteria.

"I've never done a show featuring curatorial staff on such a personal level. I've enjoyed collaborating with them," says Miller. She normally selects items and writes exhibit text alone, using antique prints to highlight the parallel development of the sciences and science illustration. She developed the exhibit concept before the pandemic, but had to shelve it due to the degree of in-person cooperation. Two years later, the unique show has come to fruition.

Each exhibit case contains items chosen by an expert, from marine snail shells studied by Howard/Berry Chair of Malacology Henry W. Chaney, Ph.D., to bird study skins preserved by Curator of Vertebrate Zoology Krista Fahy, Ph.D. Some objects have a multilayered history, like the artifacts selected by Curator of Anthropology John R. Johnson, Ph.D., which came to the Department of Anthropology during his 35 years on staff. Some favorites—like the prehistoric mammal teeth chosen by Dibblee Curator of Earth Science, Jonathan Hoffman, Ph.D.—are obscure, while others have been celebrated and their display eagerly anticipated, like the Chumash basket chosen by Curator Emeritus of Anthropology Jan Timbrook, Ph.D.

The specimens and artifacts are accompanied by portrait photography showing staff among the collections, and complemented by antique prints on related subjects. Video interviews with the curators showcase their enthusiasm for their work. As McKenzie notes, "They want everybody to be as excited about their specimens as they are." With the addition of that excitement—not to mention expertise—items in drawers transcend the status of mere objects. Like the Museum's collections, the exhibition's highly personal, contextualized array is greater than the sum of its parts. It proves Miller's point: "The more you know about anything, the more interesting it becomes. You could be exposed to the most obscure thing, but if it's put in context by somebody who's passionate and knowledgeable about it, you come away thinking, 'That's really interesting!' And that's what we're here for."

SANTA BARBARA MUSEUM of NATURAL HISTORY

Miller hopes that the human stories behind Museum science—including curators' childhood dreams to study dinosaurs or seashells for a living—will encourage guests to see museum careers as real and attainable. "If you pursue your passions, you'll find that you don't have to do it in isolation. There are mentors for you out there."

The exhibit is open through March 31, 2022 and is included in Museum admission. For more information, visit sbnature.org/drawers.

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About the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Powered by Science. Inspired by Nature. Founded in 1916, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History inspires a thirst for discovery and a passion for the natural world. The Museum seeks to connect people to nature for the betterment of both, and prides itself on being *naturally different*. For more information, visit sbnature.org.



Curators open their drawers to share a variety of specimens normally out of public view

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Maximus Gallery Exhibit Designer Marian McKenzie (left) and Maximus Gallery Curator Linda Miller (right) have been working with 14 Museum curators for two years to create *What's in our Drawers*

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A selection of shells and invertebrates on display in *What's in our Drawers*