Connected Worlds—The World, the Worldly, and the Otherworldly: An Introduction

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[...] the museum was an affirmation, the museum without walls is an interrogation.

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Museums, Universal and Imagined

One of the primary sites for the conceptualisation of an early modern worldview was the creation of collections that showcased global natural and artistic production. Only a book—Giorgio de Sepi’s (Georgius de Sepibus) description of the Romani collegii Societatis Jesu musaeum celeberrimum (Amsterdam, Johannes Janssonius van Waesberge: 1678)—remains to nurture a most intriguing actual, if no longer extant, ‘universal’ museum, a collection amassed by the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) in the Roman College of the Society of Jesus [Fig. 1].² De Sepi’s catalogue of the collection was published two years before Kircher’s death and can be understood as part of what was always a highly personal endeavour. The museum grew out of a private collection kept in Kircher’s rooms in the College, supplemented by Alfonso Donnini’s bequest, to become a public institution in 1651. It then languished in successive modes of decline until 1680, briefly resuscitated and augmented by Filippo Bonanni in 1698, before being dispersed as a casualty of the Suppression of the Society


Figure 1  Anon. (engraver), Title page to Giorgio de Sepi, Romani collegii Societatis Jesu museum celeberrimum (Amsterdam: Johannes Janssonius van Waesberge, 1678). Engraving, 19 × 34 cm. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University, Carl A. Kroch Library, Rare and Manuscript Collections (Rare Books DS708 .K58).

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