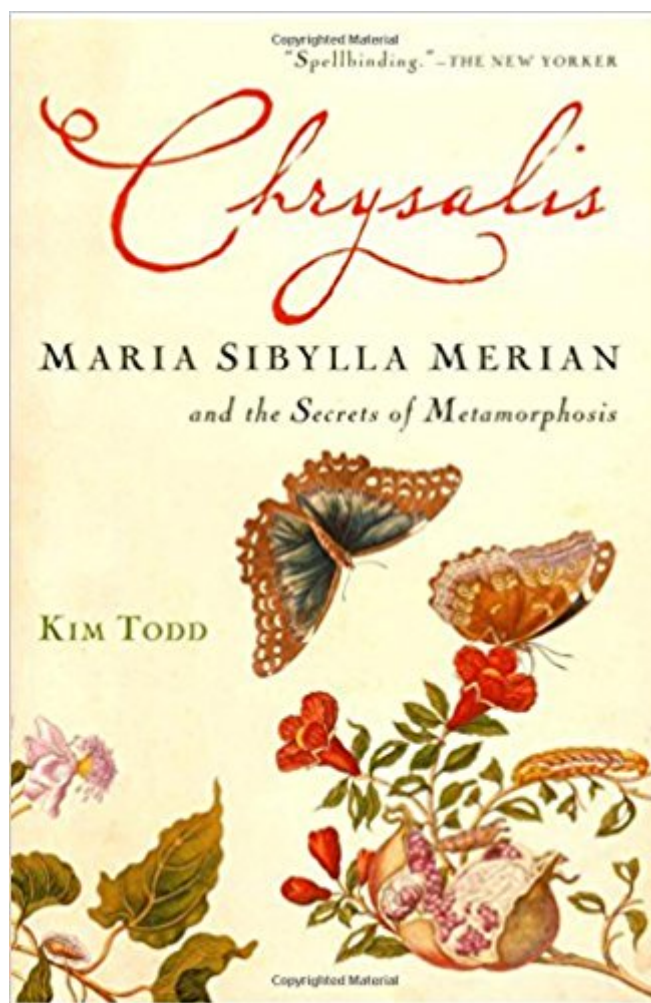


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Chrysalis: Maria Sibylla Merian And The Secrets Of Metamorphosis



Synopsis

Today, an entomologist in a laboratory can gaze at a butterfly pupa with a microscope so powerful that the swirling cells on the pupa's skin look like a galaxy. She can activate a single gene or knock it out. What she can do is discover how the insect behaves in its natural habitat—which means she doesn't know what steps to take to preserve it from extinction, nor how any particular gene may interact with the environment. Four hundred years ago, a fifty-year-old Dutch woman set sail on a solo scientific expedition to study insect metamorphosis. She could not have imagined the routine magic that scientists perform today—but her absolute insistence on studying insects in their natural habitats was so far ahead of its time that it is only now coming back into favor. *Chrysalis* restores Maria Sibylla Merian to her rightful place in the history of science, taking us from golden-age Amsterdam to the Surinam tropics to modern laboratories where Merian's insights fuel new approaches to both ecology and genetics.

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Customer Reviews

Metamorphosis has long fascinated humankind, but few people more than Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717), who spent her life illustrating this mysterious process in insects. Merian grew up in Germany, married, had two daughters, left her husband to join a Lapidist (pietist) community in West Friesland, moved to Amsterdam and, at age 52, traveled to Surinam to search for insects. Beyond that, little is known about this remarkable woman except for a few letters and her beautiful engravings and watercolors, most of them published in her books on insect metamorphosis. Todd

(Tinkering with Eden) fleshes out her biography with colorful descriptions of Merian's world and the people she knew, emphasizing that she was as exceptional in her art as in her life. Unlike other naturalists at the time, she depicted insects together with their host plants, an innovation that influenced many later 18th-century students of insect life. Merian fell out of favor in the 19th century, but today, when scientists have come to appreciate the importance of environment to insect development, her star is rising again. Todd's vivid account should do much to further the renewed interest in this unusual woman and her pioneering approach to insect illustration. 8-page color insert not seen by PW. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review Few phenomena are as compelling as metamorphosis, and few have dedicated themselves to its study as passionately as Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717). Fascinated by the transformation of caterpillars into butterflies as a girl, Merian became a renowned naturalist and artist specializing in insect life. Gifted with an innate "sense of ecology," she depicted insects within their habitats a century ahead of Audubon, who did the same for birds. Todd (Tinkering with Eden, 2001) emulates Merian's richly contextual approach in her vivid descriptions of every facet of her subject's vibrant world as she insightfully chronicles Merian's extraordinary life as the daughter of a prominent Frankfurt publisher, an artist's wife in Nuremberg, a member of an isolated religious community, a renowned scientist and artist in progressive Amsterdam, and the practitioner of pioneering fieldwork in the rain forest of Surinam. In the face of systematic misogyny, Merian made invaluable discoveries in sync with Leeuwenhoek's development of the microscope and Linnaeus' grand classification scheme, yet was soon forgotten. Todd's discerning analysis and deep appreciation resurrect Merian and reclaim her still vital achievements, ensuring that Merian will stand as the resourceful and courageous visionary she truly was. Donna Seaman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Wonderfully written. Some nice image inserts, but mostly the author explores the time period and how Maria was a fore runner for her time.

History, art, botany, biography...this book has all of these as well as a great story.

Really lovely book! Thanks!!

First of all, I love the work of Maria Sibylla Merian. I also love the Mottahedeh tableware pattern inspired by her work and called "Merian". So far, this book is a delight to read and the author truly has a gift with words. I received this very soon after placing my order and the book arrived in even better condition than described.

Another hidden female figure of science uncovered. I wish I had read about Merian as a girl and had her alongside Jane Goodall as a role model. Unconventional women making strides in field research and consequentially changing our understanding of the natural world.

This book had a slightly slow pace but told of an amazing woman.

This turned out to be a lot more interesting than I thought it was going to be. I was interested in reading about her time as a Labadist because I have people in my family who were also Labadists. There were some good things about this book. 1) Kudos to the author. I would like to know how she found her info and details, but she did a great job of opening that world view up to the reader. 2) I was amazed by the belief about where animals, and insects came from. It really made me appreciate how difficult it must have been to be a scientist at that period in time and a woman too. I really got to see how superstition prevailed in the Middle Ages and how ignorant we were as a species of life itself. I am not good about writing long product reviews but this book is a keeper for me. I'm glad I found it.

This is a fascinating book with delightful illustrations. Maria Sibylla Merian's life is very interesting and her determination to continue on her chosen path is an inspiration for all of us artists attempting to depict Nature in our own fashion.

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