

Maria Sibylla Merian

[2 April 1647 - 13 January 1717]



Special Scientific Achievements

Maria Sibylla Merian discovered the process of metamorphosis, whereby a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly.

Distinguished works:

***Der Raupen wunderbare Verwandlung und
sonderbare Blumennahrung (1679 - 1683);
Neues Blumenbuch (1680);
Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensis
(1705)***

In her memory, her portrait appeared on the 500 DM banknote.

1647 Maria Sibylla Merian is born in Frankfurt on the Main, at the end of the Thirty Year's War, daughter to wellknown copper engraver and book publisher Matthäus Merian.

After the early death of her father, her mother marries a painter. Maria gains positive artistic impulses. Her interest in the research and representation of insects, particularly caterpillars, strengthens.

1665 At 18 years of age, Maria S. Merian marries painter Andreas Graff. In the next years, an inspiring collaboration with well-known flower painter Abraham Mignon develops.

1668 After the birth of her first daughter, she founds a school for embroidery and painting in Nuremberg. Maria S. Merian receives lucrative contracts as a material painter.

1675 Publication of her first flower book, *Florium Fascilus Primus*.

1676 - 1678 Appearance of her second flower book. Maria becomes well-known as a plant artist, and experiences significant acknowledgement of her splendid, accurate work.

1678 Her second daughter is born.

1679 Maria S. Merian publishes the third and final part of her flower book. After twenty years of preparation, her first caterpillar book is published. One year later, all three volumes of her flower books are republished.

1683 Publication of the second part of her caterpillar book. For Merian, this book brings with it a reputation as an ingenious and innovative explorative painter.

1684 She separates from her husband and moves to Holland with her daughters.

1691 In Amsterdam, she learns microscopy, and pursues extensive further training.

1699 - 1701 At the age of 52, Maria Merian travels to the Dutch colony of Surinam/ Dutch-Guayana, in South America. There, she dedicates herself with great passion to the research and representation of the flora and fauna.

In 1701, a bout of malaria forces her to return to Holland.

1705 She publishes *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensis*, on which she had worked since 1702. The book sells poorly, but brings with it world-wide success. Additionally, she presents 60 copper plates featuring plant and animal motifs.

1711 - 1717 Maria Sibylla Merian suffers a stroke, but continues to work on her magnificent representations of the animal and plant world of Surinam for another six years.

1717 Maria Sibylla Merian dies in Amsterdam, and is buried in a pauper's grave.

Note:

Maria Sibylla Merian wrote her publications and research in German, which at the time was uncommon, as Latin was considered the undisputed language of the sciences. This made the study of nature more accessible to many people. Her work is a valuable documentation of many species of flora and fauna.