

The Doll's House Museum Basel presents:

Bonbonnières – the sweet art of packaging

Special exhibition from 20 October 2007 – 6 April 2008

In a unique special exhibition, the Doll's House Museum Basel is displaying more than 600 bonbonnières dating from the time between 1850 and 1960. What is surprising and remarkable about this collection – the most comprehensive in the world – is not simply the incredible diversity of these tins and containers for storing valuable goods ...

“Bon! Bon!” cried the ladies of the rococo period when first sampling the sweet titbits created by the chef to the Comte du Plessis-Praslin for his master's courtly receptions. “Bon! Bon!” thus immediately became the name for the new delicacy. The “bonbon”, or praline, rapidly became a hit among the master confectioners who adopted the invention and endeavoured to outdo one another with the most sophisticated varieties.

The name “Bonbon” eventually gave rise to the “bonbonnière”, a tin or other container used to hold exceptionally valuable goods. And “bonbons” or sweets have been regarded as precious since time immemorial. By way of example, it is said of the French queen Marie-Antoinette that she owned two turned and carved ivory bonbonnières made by Jean-Antoine Belleteste, the most famous of the Dieppe artists.

The elaborate design of earlier bonbonnières was commensurate with the expensive content. The name used for these containers in France since around 1870 was soon adopted in German. Later (and even to this day) boxes filled with confectionery are known as bonbonnières.

Display items

In its exhibition, the Doll's House Museum Basel is mainly displaying bonbonnières made from cardboard or papier maché, most of them produced in Germany. The diversity of these bonbonnières seems to be endless. There were thousands of subjects: suitcases, men's hats, top hats, sailor's hats, various fruits, all kinds of baskets, furniture, musical instruments, ships, shoes... to mention but a few. Wonderful bonbonnières were also made on the subject

of animals. There are examples in papier maché or a mixture that have been painted, sprayed or covered with fur or mohair. Often these objects were also used as toys, probably one of the reasons why there are not very many surviving examples anywhere in the world ... Dolls make up another group. Here there are complete dolls made from porcelain with a compartment concealed in the body. The body can be opened and the compartment filled with confectionery.

Bonbonnières to suit the season or for special events

Special bonbonnières were of course created for the most varied events. There is a remarkably wide selection of Easter items to admire. To celebrate births, there was a stork and for christenings, people liked to give boxes bearing the name and christening date. At Christmas, sales of “Candy Containers” (as they are also known) were particularly good in those days. There were Father Christmases, pine cones wrapped in brightly coloured foil and any number of small items that could be hung on the Christmas tree. For New Year's Eve, you could buy pigs of every size in papier maché, a mixture or even covered with fur. The chimney sweep and mushroom lucky charms were of course not omitted. You can find the bizarre and the comical, as well as familiar fairytale figures such as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs while popular cartoon figures such as Popeye are also represented.

Ingenious opening techniques

Many “Candy Containers” are not immediately easily recognisable as such at first glance. In order to get to the sweet surprises, concealed in a compartment in the lower body, on most dolls the upper body has first to be removed. Other dolls simply conceal their sweet secret beneath a wide dress. With birds, especially cranes, storks and ducks, one of the wings can be raised to find the sweets in the cavity below. On furniture, the drawers or doors can be opened and cigars can be pulled apart in the middle. The opening mechanisms for the bonbonnières are every bit as diverse and complex as the themes.

Boxes by “La Marquise de Sévigné”

The exhibition also features a collection of confectionery boxes from “La Marquise de Sévigné”. The history of this chocolate factory reads like a fairy tale. It begins in 1898, when husband and wife Auguste and Clémentine Rouzaud established a chocolate factory in

Royat (France). From the outset, they made it their business to produce nothing but the very finest and best chocolate. Their product was intended to be a luxury-class item. To achieve this, Madame Rouzaud had an inspired marketing strategy. She invented “La Marquise de Sévigné” and sold their products under this name from then on. As a result, their chocolate products soon enjoyed a triumphant success throughout France. Within just fourteen years (1900 to 1914) eleven retail shops were opened, two of them in Paris. Those who considered themselves superior bought their confectionery at “La Marquise de Sévigné”.

Workshops

During this special exhibition, we cordially invite our young visitors to the workshops. These are held on certain weekends from 14.00 – 18.00. Participation is free of charge. Selected cardboard bonbonnières can be decorated in many different ways under expert instruction. All you need to bring is a little patience and a sense of enjoyment in making things.

Opening hours

Museum, shop and café: daily from 10.00 – 18.00

Admission

CHF 7.00/ 5.00

Children up to 16 years of age are admitted free and only if accompanied by an adult.

No additional charge for the special exhibition.

The entire building is wheelchair accessible.

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