

**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 delicacies. 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” (for confectionery) 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. Up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, bonbonnières were elaborate and richly decorated tins. They could be made of gold and silver and embellished with precious stones. These ornate pieces of art were not only used for storage; they were also greatly valued display items and given as showpiece and symbolic presents. Clock tins and music boxes with surprising contents were created as luxury variants. These handcrafted tins were made from precious metals, alabaster or porcelain and decorated with inlays made of ivory, mother of pearl, tortoiseshell, amber or enamel. 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.

Against this cultural and historical background, bonbonnières were also used as presents at celebrations, christenings and weddings; they were given to guests by the hosts as an expression of gratitude and souvenir of their participation in the event.

In earlier times, honey and syrup were mainly used for sweetening. Confectionery made of sugar, such as a lozenge-shaped sweet made from candied violet petals, for example, were only affordable to a select few. 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 into the German language. 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 were actually produced in Germany, but were frequently destined for export to France, Austria and the USA. 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. Here, too, the diversity seems almost unbelievable: goats, bison, horses, chickens, ducks, dogs, cats, lions, a whole zoo is available, whereby fur-covered dogs in particular were a popular accessory to complement fine porcelain dolls. Often these objects were also used as toys, probably one of the reasons why there are not too 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. For the simpler version, the head is mounted directly on a box in which the sweets are placed. The dolls' heads or upper bodies were made of wax, porcelain, biscuit china and later of celluloid. The subjects for the bonbonnières were naturally oriented towards the prevailing fashion and the spirit of the times. Both the Art Deco era and the dainty Victorian style are represented.

## **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: papier maché bunnies in every size and shape, small and larger ducks as well as the famous Easter egg as an ever-recurring theme. These came in the more modest examples, covered with brightly coloured paper, or the more luxurious version, covered in silk and decorated with an additional hand-painted subject. Lead design features or small brass feet were also used as decorative elements. 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. But there were also bonbonnières unique to certain regions or countries. These include the so-called "Krampus". This is mainly encountered in Austria and shows a type of demonic figure. 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 particular, the subjects in the form of figures have more to offer than meets the eye 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. In the case of animal figures, the head usually has to be removed first. 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. Then there are shoes, handbags and eggs with silk pouches that could be filled, as well as cases and travel bags which could be opened in the normal way for filling. 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 but "La Marquise de Sévigné" products were also available in Nice, Lyon, Cannes, Monte-Carlo and Deauville. Those who considered themselves superior bought their confectionery at "La Marquise de

Sévigné". The decoration on the confectionery boxes often depicted scenes from the time of Louis XIV with "La Marquise de Sévigné" and her typical, unmistakable hairstyle. The products were extremely expensive. The "Chez Fouquet" box from the 1923 Christmas range depicting Madame Rouzaud as "La Marquise de Sévigné" as a guest at one of Fouquet's parties, already cost 33.00 francs in those days.

### **The history of chocolate and the presentation of the sweet treats**

Chocolate was brought back to Europe from the New World by the Spanish conquistadors at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Aztecs enjoyed cocoa mixed with maize in a type of porridge or flavoured with honey or cinnamon as a drink. It is however only the Spanish, who came up with the idea of combining cocoa with cane sugar, which are regarded as the real inventors of chocolate. Gradually, the consumption of chocolate spread throughout the Spanish empire. The Spanish kept up the import and manufacturing monopoly until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was only after this time that chocolate found its way to Holland and the remainder of Europe.

The exhibition also shows the confectionery which might have been in the containers at the time. These include candied fruits, candied violet or rose petals, fruit jellies, sugared almonds, nougat, fondants, marzipan fruits and marzipan sweets, silver pearls as well as raspberry or cream caramels. And of course, the pralines that have retained their popularity to this day. Pralines are chocolate confectionery filled with a ganache or with nougat, nuts, pistachios, liqueur, and marzipan or such-like and are regarded as the pinnacle of the chocolate-maker's art on account of their elaborate manufacturing process.

### **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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