

The Doll's House Museum Basel presents:

Santa & Co. with tempting contents

**Special exhibition on Candy Containers over the Christmas period,
24 November 2007 to 3 February 2008**

As part of the current special exhibition “Bonbonnières – the sweet art of packaging”, in the run-up to Christmas the Doll's House Museum is displaying a unique collection of special festive Candy Containers dating from the period between 1910 and 1960. An exceptional Christmas Exhibition.

“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”, also known under the English term “candy container”. It was thought of as a confectionery tin or a container for holding exceptionally valuable items. And “bonbons” or sweets were regarded as very precious, too. Up until the 19th century, bonbonnières were elaborate and richly decorated containers. They could be made of gold and silver and embellished with precious stones. 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.

Against this cultural and historical background, bonbonnières were also used as presents at celebrations, christenings and weddings or were even given on festive occasions such as Christmas. In earlier times, only honey and syrup were generally 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 candy containers was commensurate with the expensive content.

Display items during the Christmas period

The Christmas Exhibition will mainly feature candy containers made from cardboard, papier-mâché or cotton wool. The majority were produced in Germany, but were frequently destined for export to France, Austria and the USA. The diversity of these bonbonnières appears endless. For example, Saint Nicholas or his colleague, chubby Santa Claus, with or without reindeer-drawn sled, usually made of papier-mâché, as well as angels with porcelain heads, and the grand and wintery-looking “Niko” made from white cotton wool. All of them conceal a little secret: they serve as a container for confectionery.

All the Father Christmas figures and angels are made from papier-mâché or have porcelain heads. Concealed in the bodies of these complete dolls is a compartment. The body can be opened and the compartment filled. Often the figures sat on tree trunks that could be filled. There were also other Christmas symbols however. For example, pine cones wrapped in brightly coloured foil and bells that could be opened in the middle. Also popular were children on skis or a sled as well as the sweet “snow babies”, mounted on a sphere decorated with a winter landscape. The snowman was also a popular theme for a candy container.

Bonbonnières around the Christmas tree

Christmas was of course a big time for the sale of candy containers. The exhibition also features a large number of small candy containers designed to be hung on the Christmas tree. An amazing variety of small objects are hanging on the “Feather trees” (an early type of artificial Christmas tree) in the exhibition. These were generally mass-produced in large numbers. There are also examples of hand-made items produced by homeworkers. In earlier times, these small candy containers were most welcome presents, often distributed among young people in the church on Christmas Eve or given by the teachers to their pupils. Once their sweet contents had been consumed, they continued to serve for many years as decorations on the Christmas tree. There was almost no end to the things that could be hung on the tree. Cornet-shaped bags, for example, as well as musical instruments, pouches, baskets and animals, were extremely popular. All of the objects could be filled. Often they had small silk bags with space for just a few very tiny sweets.

Today the so-called “Dresden Candy Containers” are among the most sought-after pieces among collectors. From around 1880 until the First World War, Christmas tree decorations were made from fine paper or cardboard. Fishes, ships, musical instruments, baskets etc. evoked the impression of embossed silver miniatures. They were, however, only made from thin cardboard. Some of the embossed silver and gold laminated three-dimensional objects were painted or lacquered and often decorated with other materials. The characteristic feature of the “Dresden Cardboard” was the use of embossing, stamping and assembly

techniques to produce Christmas tree decorations from the cheapest material, paper, that exuded style and conveyed an air of luxury, while remaining affordable for wide sections of the public. The paper Christmas decorations stood out not only for their meticulous craftsmanship but also especially for their wealth of shapes. Purely religious subjects were never realised. They were known as Dresden Christmas decorations because they were largely produced there, although there were also factories in Leipzig, Berlin and other places.

The Austrian “Krampus” and Saint Nicholas

The exhibition features two particularly striking figures. Saint Nicholas is known here in Switzerland as “Santichlaus”. He brings small gifts for the children on 6 December. The figure is derived from Bishop Nicholas of Myra who lived in the Roman province of Lycia in Asia Minor during the third century. He is said to have performed miracles. His counterpart and often his companion – known here in Switzerland as “Schmutzli” – is known as the “Krampus” in Austria. This grinning demonic figure, between 20 and 60 cm in height, is generally mounted on a plinth and painted red and black, the colours of hell. He may also appear dressed as a skier, rococo cavalier or chestnut roaster. Glass eyes are sometimes used to give a life-like look to these demonic faces made from modelling mixture with their horns and donkey’s ears. Tails, hoofs and red tongues betray their demonic origin. Their bodies are made from wood or wire, covered with wool, fabric, felt, paper and fur. Saint Nicholas often has a painted face in porcelain or modelling mixture when used as the subject of a confectionery tin. The exhibition mainly features Saint Nicholas figures with painted faces made from papier-mâché. Their clothes are made from elaborately decorated fabric, silk or crêpe paper. Concealed in the hollow bodies of the figures is a compartment that can be filled from the bottom with confectionery. The toymakers of Thuringia (Germany) in particular specialised in this type of Saint Nicholas products; these, too, were mostly destined for export to the USA. The Saint Nicholas and Krampus figures displayed in the exhibition date mainly from the early 20th century.

Ingenious opening techniques

Many “candy containers” are not immediately recognisable as such at first glance. In particular, the Father Christmas and Saint Nicholas figures have more to offer than is immediately apparent. 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. Others simply conceal their sweet secret beneath a wide dress. In the case of animal figures, the head usually has to be removed first. The opening mechanisms for the bonbonnières are every bit as diverse and complex as the themes.

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 15th 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, that 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 17th 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 confectionery, silver pearls as well as raspberry and 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, our young visitors are cordially invited 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.

The Doll's House Museum Basel

Steinenvorstadt 1

4051 Basel

Telephone +41 (0)61 225 95 95

Fax +41 (0)61 225 95 96

www.puppenhausmuseum.ch