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The Doll's House Museum Basel presents:

Fans: holders of secrets

**A special exhibition of a unique fan collection,
from 17 October 2009 to 5 April 2010**

Anyone who hears the word fan and thinks only of Spain and flamenco is underestimating the significant role that fans have played in the social life of different eras over the centuries. They have reflected the prevailing trends in art as well as the intellectual and cultural climate. Fans have been considered a status symbol and an essential fashion accessory. They have served as an advertising medium and even had a language of their own. Over 200 unique fans on display as part of a special exhibition at the Doll's House Museum Basel provide evidence for all of these claims.

History of the fan

Fans were known even in ancient Egypt. Of course, these were not hand-held fans, but rather large fans that servants kept in motion to provide ventilation. In earlier times, palm leaves and other natural materials were also used to provide cooling or to drive away insects.

Hand-held fans were not used in Europe until the 16th century. In costume books and portraits from that era, depictions of fans are seen most commonly in Italy. One example is the flag fan, which is shaped like a rigid pennant on a handle and is a characteristic Venetian design. Other examples include feather plumes and folding fans.

The flat nature of most types of fans made decorative designs appealing. The sticks invited a great diversity of ornamentation, and carving, open-work, gilding and painting with precious designs were all popular. The leaves of folding fans were an especially popular canvas for

artistry. Favourite themes included Greek legends, bible stories, pastoral and harbour scenes and chinoiserie.

High demand for fans soon led to local production in Europe which went into high gear in the 17th and 18th centuries. Fan-making became a recognized trade for craftsmen. France was one of the main centres of fan production and there were more than 150 master fan craftsmen by the middle of the 18th century.

The 18th century, and particularly the rococo era (1720–1770), was the golden age of the fan. The sticks were made of very expensive materials such as ivory, mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell. Gold and silver plating, carvings and even precious stones were sometimes included.

In the 18th century, it became popular to depict current events on fans such as the French Revolution, the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius or the first montgolfière flight. Around the time of the French Revolution – an age with little demand for luxury goods – current events and political statements were printed on simple fans made of wood and paper. During the First French Empire (1799–1814) and the Biedermeier era (1815–1848), highly delicate, ornamented fans conforming to the fashion of that age were sold that were made of finely perforated horn or bone; the leaf was often decorated with gleaming sequins. In the middle of the 19th century, the fan entered a new period of popularity. A reorientation in fashion back towards the 18th century can be attributed primarily to the personal tastes of the trendsetting Eugénie, Empress of the French (1826–1920). This is clearly visible by examining the décor used for fan leaves. Famed Parisian fan-makers such as Duvelleroy and Alexandre employed their own fan painters and dominated the market, shipping their products all across Europe.

Starting in the late 18th century, in response to growing interest in chinoiserie and Japonism, fans originating in the Chinese city of Canton were increasingly brought to Europe. The hippest types that were imported included extremely finely carved ivory fans as well as "mandarin fans" or "fans with a hundred faces". These fans were decorated with innumerable figurines having tiny appliquéd ivory faces and silk clothing.

Starting in 1860, handmade lace was frequently used as the leaf in frames made of mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell, ivory or ebony. Towards the end of the 19th century, fans made using colourful, exotic feathers from the ostrich, peacock and bird of paradise were in style.

At the end of the 19th century, brisé fans made from small wood plates were used as dance cards. Men would write their name on the leaves of the fan to reserve a specific dance with the lady.

At the start of the 20th century, interest in hand-held fans grew. The belle époque (approx. 1885–1914) produced some high-quality fans of its own. Rococo motifs were often combined with the floral idiom of Art Nouveau. The roaring twenties, as part of the Art Deco era, witnessed large balls and events with oversized fans created from colourful ostrich feathers.

Fans were also eagerly used as an advertising medium at that time. They are still used in this manner in Japan even today.

It was after World War II that the fan finally met its downfall. Hardly any fans are manufactured in Europe today. The last of the fan-making shops can be found in Paris and London as well as in Spain. There, however, production is focused on inexpensive souvenir fans and traditional flamenco fans.

Until the early 20th century, the fan was a lady's indispensable fashion accessory, and she would always seek to carry the right fan to complement her outfit or the occasion.

Fans served as a status symbol with their costly and sophisticated construction. The elegance and sensitivity of fans made them into a symbol of femininity. Ladies used the fan in society as a means of communications and for playful coquetterie. There were trick fans that would show different scenes depending on the direction in which they were turned. The two outer guard sticks in fans were sometimes used to house thermometers, hidden mirrors or levers for special mechanisms designed for entertainment purposes.

No matter what interest fans might hold today, they remain a mirror of their own era, reflecting the prevailing trends in art as well as the intellectual and cultural climate.

Fan-makers and painters

Fans were never made by a single person. Different artisans were often involved in making the costly and artfully decorated frames, including ivory carvers, sculptors, engravers, wood turners and painters. With the arrival of highly ornamented guard sticks around 1870 ("jewel fans"), the production process came to include gemsmiths, goldsmiths and sometimes even jewellers.

The language of fans

The language of fans is the most gallant language in the world. The fan represents a refined instrument for self-expression. It can be used to express any emotion with grace and clarity. The 18th century, particularly the rococo era, was the golden age of the fan. It also witnessed the birth of the language of fans. Fan language is, of course, not a proper language in itself.

It is a code that initiates can use to pass signals among themselves. All of these codes revolve around the most enchanting of social activities, i.e. flirting and lover's games.

In London and Paris, there reputedly existed fan academies that were intended to teach this gracious code to ladies and gentlemen.

The surviving interpretation of the various gestures comes primarily from an undated publication by fan manufacturer Duvelleroy. As part of the exhibition at the Doll's House Museum, visitors can view gestures used in fan language during short film sequences and

then step in front of a “magic mirror” to test their own aptitude for this different style of flirting. A parchment roll documenting fan language can also be purchased from the museum shop for anyone interested in at-home practice.

Madame Volet’s collection

This exhibition at the Doll’s House Museum features over 200 fans from Madame Volet’s unique collection. As one might gather from the title of the exhibition, the fans hold many secrets that are not readily apparent at first glance. Fans were often used for very different purposes. There exist fans that served as opera glasses and others that could be used as an effective weapon. One unusual example is the “pocket violin with fan for dancing masters”. This is a miniature violin that is actually playable and includes a fan for the dance instructor. It is also true that everyday objects have been equipped with fans. Notable examples include a walking stick and a riding crop – each with a built-in fan.

The exhibition also includes fans that were owned by famous people from earlier times. One good example is the diamond-studded fan with white ostrich feathers owned by the Princess of Thurn and Taxis from the year 1890.

Events and contests during the exhibition

The exhibition includes some surprises for visitors, including the opportunity to test their knowledge or engage their creativity. One example is a special “Mirror on the wall” to introduce visitors to the coquettish language of fans, along with a chance to immediately realize what they have seen and have a photograph taken in the process. The picture taken here serves as a lovely souvenir of the exhibition.

Young visitors (from 6 years) can participate in a workshop and, with the aid of a skilled expert, decorate their own fan which they can proudly take home. A paper fan is provided along with craft supplies such as feathers, pearls, glimmer, glitter and more. Participation is free of charge, but please bring a dose of patience.

These workshops are held between 13.30 and 17.30 on the following dates:

Saturday, 17 October 2009 / Sunday, 18 October 2009

Saturday, 31 October 2009 / Sunday, 1 November 2009

Saturday, 14 November 2009 / Sunday, 15 November 2009

Saturday, 28 November 2009 / Sunday, 29 November 2009

Saturday, 12 December 2009 / Sunday, 13 December 2009

Saturday, 19 December 2009 / Sunday, 20 December 2009

Saturday, 19 December 2009 / Sunday, 20 December 2009

Sunday, 27 December 2009

Saturday, 2 January 2010 / Sunday, 3 January 2010

Saturday, 16 January 2010 / Sunday, 17 January 2010

Saturday, 30 January 2010 / Sunday, 31 January 2010

Saturday, 13 February 2010 / Sunday, 14 February 2010

Saturday, 13 March 2010 / Sunday, 14 March 2010

Two contests will be held to allow visitors to test their knowledge of Swiss geography and Swiss traditional costumes.

If you are more interested in expressing your own creativity, you can participate in our "Who can make the most beautiful fan?" contest. There will be winners in two categories:

Youth/adults and children up to 12 years old. All of the contests offer exciting prizes for the winners, and every participant will at least receive a consolation prize.

Basel Museum Night

Fans will be on display at the Doll's House Museum during the Museum Night on Friday, 22 January 2010 too. Some sensational fan-related entertainment is on the programme.

International artists will present flamenco and other fan dances, magic tricks using fans, juggling with fans and more. The highlight will be a fan-themed laser show created especially for this occasion. Don't miss it!

Opening hours

Museum, shop and café: Daily from 10.00 to 18.00

Admission

CHF 7.00 / 5.00

Children up to 16 years of age are admitted free of charge and only in the company of adults.

No additional charge for the special exhibition.

The entire building is wheelchair-accessible.

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Important fan terminology

Sticks: Skeleton and frame in fans made from diverse materials and constructions.

Leaf: Covering of folding fans which is attached to the top of the sticks or is double-mounted. The leaves can be made of paper, silk, swan skin, leather, lace or other materials.

Guard sticks: The two outer sticks of a fan which are typically reinforced and highly decorated. They are intended to simultaneously protect the fan.

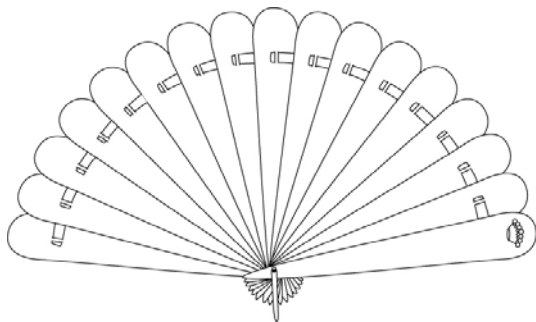
Frame: A term designating all of the sticks and guard sticks.

Rivet: Riveted or screwed pin which holds together the sticks at the bottom of the fan; the rivet is sometimes adorned with precious stones.

Eye: Small round disk usually made of ivory or mother-of-pearl and situated around the rivet.

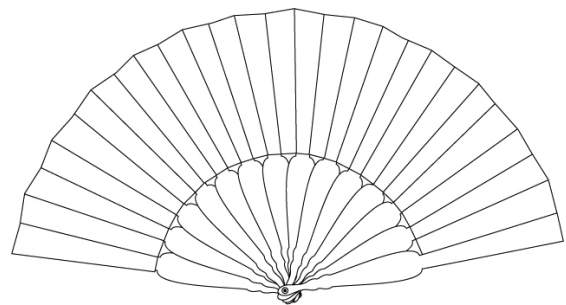
Fan types

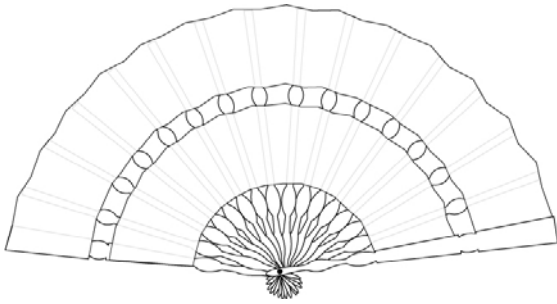
Fans are distinguished based on their form and design.



Brisé fans: This is the simplest type of folding fan. Multiple sticks in the form of very long wedges are placed on top of one another. A pin is inserted through a hole in the lower end to hold the sticks together. The upper ends are held together by a ribbon. The sticks can be made of wood, ivory, tortoiseshell or horn. This design was most common in the early 18th century and is still popular in China today.

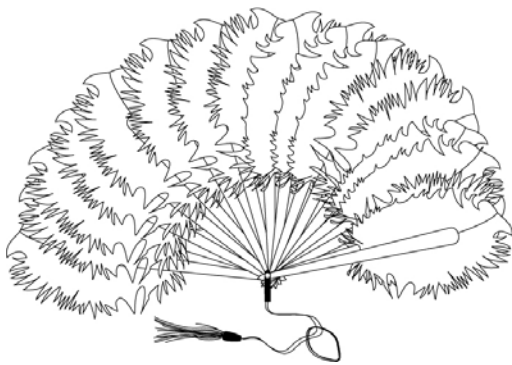
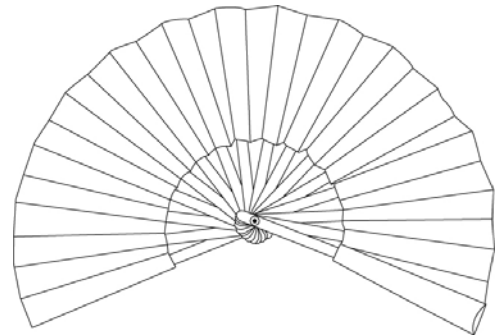
Folding fans: This is the best known and most popular type of fan. Here too, the sticks are held together by a pin situated at the lower end and a ribbon at the top end. Here, however, the ribbon is wide enough to cover a quarter to two thirds of the length of the sticks. In this case, the ribbon is also referred to as the leaf. This leaf usually consists of paper, parchment or (from ca 1770) also fabric. Later, leaves made of lace also existed.





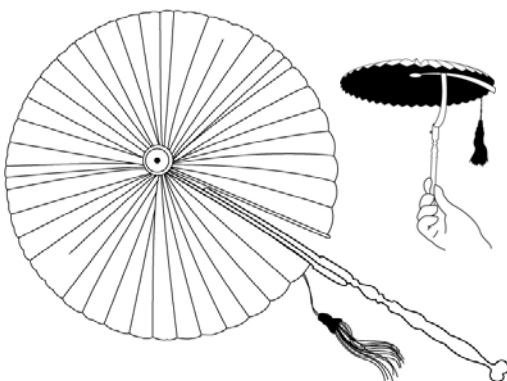
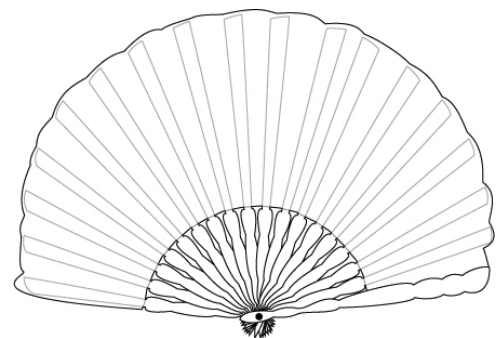
There exist variants on the folding fan including the **cabriolet fan** in which the leaf is divided in the middle and takes on the form of two separate semicircles.

In the **telescopic fan**, the leaf slides up and down along the sticks. If the leaf is all the way down, the fan is only half as long as a normal fan and can be opened by more than 180° . If the leaf is all the way up, the fan opens up less than 180° but it has the area of a normal fan.



In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, **feather fans** were popular. Bird feathers – usually ostrich feathers – were bonded to the sticks instead of a paper or leather leaf.

In the **balloon fan**, the sticks are longer towards the centre so that the leaf takes on the shape of a hot air balloon. This design was popular around 1890–1920.



In the **parasol fan**, the fan leaf can be opened into a full circle and pivoted by means of a hinge connected to the stick. This allows the parasol fan to be used like a wheel fan or a minisunshade.

In the **wheel fan**, the leaf has no sticks and is situated between two significantly longer guard sticks which hide and protect the leaf in the closed state. This type of fan can be opened by 360° so the long guard sticks form a handle.

