

From 12 November 2001 until 3 February 2002 a special exhibition will be on show at the Doll's House Museum, Basle entitled „The most beautiful gingerbread pictures from days gone by“. Numerous glossy pictures will be on display, which reflect the wide-ranging creativity at the end of the nineteenth century. Live demonstrations will also take place on set days to show the art of gingerbread decoration.

The history of gingerbread

Until sometime in the thirteenth century gingerbread, called honey cake, was dispensed as medicine. However, as it became quickly more popular, the original reason for taking it was soon forgotten. Apparently the present-day gingerbread with its numerous ingredients originated in a monastery. The ingredients include honey, flour, sugar, eggs, nuts and the exotic spices, which give the special gingerbread taste. Already in Nürnberg in 1395 the gingerbread makers' profession was officially recognised. The German name for gingerbread which is „Lebkuchen“ derived from the word „Leben“ or life and presumably referred to the life-enhancing energy of honey.

Holy origins?

Originally the Holy Communion bread was called „Oblate“ in German or wafers. However, since the thirteenth century this term has been used for fine cakes. Before baking, the cake mix is spread over the wafers, which prevent the gingerbread from sticking to the tin when in the oven. In the second half of the nineteenth century the baked gingerbread was decorated with embossed glossy pictures and completed with icing sugar piping.

A century in print

In the middle of the nineteenth century the technical innovations in flat-bed printing, colour lithography and high-speed printing created a flood of printed products with pictures. Originally the designs were simple. From simple beginnings, a clear symbolic language evolved as shown in pictures with flowers, animals, good luck symbols, different colours and much fantasy, which were richly decorated contemporary witnesses. These pictures illustrated, sometimes with a lot of humour, the highlights of the times. They became the cause of a new collectors' euphoria in England, Germany and Austria. The pictures were printed on large sheets, covered with a glossy finish and embossed.

A symbol of esteem

In the second half of the nineteenth century the desire to collect wafers was combined with the custom of proving one's mutual esteem in written maxims and drawings in the guest's books. These dedications and poems were increasingly accompanied by glossy pictures. The rapid spread of this custom in addition boosted the production of the pictures.

An endless range of motifs and themes

Any visitor to this special exhibition will soon realize, that the old wafers on exhibition in the Doll's House Museum testify to the almost unlimited fantasy, which inspired the illustrators at the end of the nineteenth century.

Artistic samples

Live demonstrations by Mrs. Heidi Schmelzer from Basle will give an introduction to the art of decorating gingerbread. She will create beautiful little pieces of art by decorating the gingerbread artistically with sugar icing and pictures. Many delicious gingerbread recipes will be available, free of charge, for anybody who would like to try out at home which recipe they like best. An attractive selection of new glossy pictures is also available in the Museum shop.

The live demonstrations will take place from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on the following days:

Sunday, 18. November 2001

Wednesday, 28 November 2001

Sunday, 2 December 2001

Sunday, 9 December 2001

Wednesday, 12 December 2001

Sunday, 16 December 2001

Sunday, 13 January 2002

Sunday, 27 January 2002

Opening Hours

Museum/Shop: Daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursdays until 8 p.m.

Café: Daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursdays until 9 p.m.

Entry: Fr. 7.-/ Fr. 5.-, children up to 16 years free of charge, only if accompanied by an adult.

No extra charge for the special exhibition.

The Museum is accessible for wheelchairs.

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