

A Collection of Miniatures

Tiny Things Release Your Inner Child

By Shannon Ravenel

The guidebook said, "The Miniatures Museum of Taiwan (*Xiuzhen Bowuguan*) houses a superb collection of miniatures from around the world, brought together by the husband-and-wife owners. Instantly brings out the inner child in adult visitors...."

On my own for a morning in Taipei (where the taxi drivers do not speak English), I was looking for a place within walking distance of our hotel. Because of the nearness of the Miniatures Museum and the promise of the release of my inner child, I headed for Jianguo N. Road and, after only a few recalculations of my inner GPS, found the museum in its tiny basement venue, paid my NT\$180 (S\$7.72) and entered a realm quite unlike any other I have encountered.

First to present itself is a display of Barbie's extended family – yes, Barbie, the still wildly popular US doll, and her relatives and friends – all ages and ethnicities, all in alluring outfits. Barbie herself is represented several times in her various ensembles, some of which I recognised from my daughters' collection 30 years back. To immediately confront the visitor with this blatantly lowbrow tip-of-the-hat to commercialism is, I decided

later, clever of the curators. Whatever else she may be, Barbie is a miniature American teenager (ageless at 50) and through her, our introduction to the concept of miniaturisation is swift and provocative.

The rest of the exhibits are, however, of an entirely different nature: more than 150 dollhouses and room-boxes with cut-away views ranging from the miniature Buckingham Palace to the Seven Dwarfs' tiny humble cottage. But what I found myself peering into most intently were the exquisite room-boxes, making sure to note every tiny artefact – spice boxes in the kitchen cupboards, dog water-bowls on kitchen floors, whisks beside the mixing bowls, books on bedside tables – experiencing, in fact, miniature Peeping Tom-ism, all on a 12:1 scale of accuracy. In at least one of the rooms, there is a room-box within a room-box. The one inside sits on a 12:1 scale table and is itself rendered in 120:1 scale.

Miniatures originated in German palaces of the 16th century as tools for teaching aristocratic children. While Taipei's Miniatures Museum is the first to specialise in contemporary miniatures, it also boasts antique pieces dating from the late 19th century. The



The Rose Mansion

idea for the museum originated during the owners' extensive travels abroad. Mr & Mrs Lin Wen-ren's custom of bringing home souvenirs in the form of miniature art led them to artists currently working in the US, Canada, Japan, England, Scotland and some European countries, as well as artisans in Taiwan itself. The museum was opened in 1997 and, in order to further promote miniature art in the homeland, it arranges classes in which children have the opportunity to create scale models of their own.

I spent hours in the museum and then at least another hour in its truly wonderful gift shop which offers every conceivable object in miniature – from toothbrushes, toothpaste and floss (to give to my dentist) to a box of Pampers (for my new grandson).

This little museum, competing with the National Palace Museum with its 650,000+ pieces, proves once again what we all know in our hearts – that there is art to be found in almost everything.

The Miniatures Museum of Taiwan, B1, 96 Jianguo N. Road, Sec. 1, is open from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, Tuesday through Sunday. It is closed on Monday and the first day after a public holiday.

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Photos courtesy of Gilad Feldman at Fili's World (<http://www.filiation.com/blog/>)



A children's room