# MICROCOSMIC REVERIES:

# NARCISSA THORNE'S MINIATURE PERIOD ROOMS

by

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# DEDICATION

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# ABSTRACT

Narcissa Thorne's Miniature Period Rooms and miniatures as an object are overlooked within Art History. Miniatures should hold a place within the history of Decorative Arts due to the nature of the original intentions of their creation and display in Western civilization and design. Beyond misconceptions of historical predecessors, miniatures explore a psychoanalytic relationship to the microcosm and displacement of desire within creators, collectors, and viewers of this unique form of decorative art. Previous research on the study of the Thorne Miniature Period rooms and related subjects is sparse to non-existent. Particularly with the subject being relegated to that of an effeminate hobby, rather than a legitimate and complex artform that presents a mode for unique self-expression and opportunities form education and validation. In researching this subject I rely on methods of psychoanalysis and the writings of Susan Stewart, a literary philosopher who speaks extensively on scale and the psyche of the human mind. This is explored after an in-depth histography of miniature forms and understanding of the ideation and fabrication that went into the production of the Thorne Miniature Period Rooms. Contrary to what is often assumed of miniatures as simply toys, in fact the object has been primarily witnessed in largely adult, feminine social spheres. Narcissa Thorne participated in a form of self-expression of her potential desires for control, suspension of time, intellectual exploration and validation by her contemporaries. A form of self-expression that has continued today and has only grown in popularity of viewers, collectors, and creators.

# INTRODUCTION

The bleached woodwork of the curved walls seems to drink in the golden hour light of morning, reflecting it onto the posh yet cozy interior. The setting conveys a sense of affluence and cultivation of the 1930s, combining several styles that emerged following World War I. The room celebrates centers of design and craftsmanship, Berlin, Vienna, and its homestead of Paris. Influence of the French colonialization of Indochina is evident in the Asian influenced designs of the furniture and decoration. Bamboo sidechairs, lacquered tables and the white gold brocade upholstery of the baquette and matching tub chairs. Far Eastern accents of carnelian bowls, gilt Buddha and the pedestalled Khmer head act as punctuating décor in the room. The sleek black and gold fireplace is flanked by rows of leatherbound volumes whose covers further accentuate the color profile of the library. Large needlepoint tapestries, featuring stylized cubist cityscapes break up the paper-like pale woodwork of the walls. The stylized curves and neutral metallics of gold and bronze recall a nostalgia for the 1920s Art Deco. A centered doorway peeks out onto a formal rooftop garden arranged in deference to an alabaster modernist sculpture of a half-nude female figure. A doorway to the right opens onto an quaint iron railed balcony, on which the iron wrought café table is set for breakfast. From this breakfast setting a dramatic panoramic view of Paris, including the infamous Eiffel tower is visible in the distance. One might look at this meticulous room and imagine a character such as Agatha Christie's Herculé Poirot strutting in to have his morning tea and tarts. While it can be imagined, a mouse such as Beatrix Potter's Hunca Munca would be more at ease in the space, as this French library measures 1:12 scale or one inch to every foot.

The room described above is one of the miniature creations of Narcissa Thorne. The French Library (of the Modern Period, 1930s) is the 27th room in the European series of 68 rooms housed in the Chicago Art Institute's Thorne Miniature Gallery (FIG. 1). The plan of this gallery can be described as an extended semi-circle, the walls painted green and fitted with 68 wood-framed room-boxes (or miniature period rooms) that wrap around the perimeter and punctuate the stand-alone U shaped structural frame-work in the center (FIG. 2). The size of most of these room-boxes is varied, but most measure around 10 x 25 x 15 inches, and their scale is 1:12 (one inch to every foot), with proportions kept in such equilibrium that you can be convinced you are looking into a period room. The designer, Narcissa Thorne, expended considerable funds and labor on room-boxes that could be used as a reference tool for interior decorators and that easily deceive the eye in photographs as full-scale period interiors. These works' high quality and detail separate them from other miniature interiors, both predecessors and contemporaries. Apart from their general popularity today, these interiors refer to a particular time in American collecting and design (the 1930s), when the priorities and contributions of collectors to the exhibition reflected public desire for luxury, nostalgia, and entertainment. The Thorne Miniature Rooms and Miniatures as an object are overlooked within Art History. Despite this miniatures should hold a place within the history of Decorative Arts due to the nature of the original intentions of their creation and display in Western civilization and design. Furthermore the Thorne Miniature Rooms deserve a placement within the history of American Art due to Thorne's attempt to elevate American Interior Design to the standard of taste making set by European historical and contemporary design.

Miniatures are not referenced in the history of decorative arts and while I give an overview here of placement within this history, chapter one further expounds upon its iterations. The history of decorative arts is a vast and rich subject that encompasses various art forms and styles across different cultures and time periods. It refers to the creation and adornment of functional objects, often with an emphasis on aesthetic beauty and craftsmanship.[1] In its earliest iterations decorative arts included intricate jewelry, pottery, frescos, sculpture, and architectural ornamentation. Many of these forms of decorative art often featured imagery associated with their religious beliefs including classical motifs such as floral patterns, human figures and mythological scenes. Miniatures were being utilized in these ancient civilizations in a form of cult decorative art.[2] Decorative arts is expanded upon through the use of mosaics, intricate textiles, illustrated manuscripts, stone carving, stained glass windows, and the commissioning of paintings through guilds. Throughout these periods of the Medieval, Byzantine, Gothic, and Renaissance the focus of decorative arts primarily featured early Christian imagery and emphasized traditional Christian gender roles. Near the end of this period saw the early machinations of the miniature as decorative arts in the form of the Bébé House.[3] Moving through the Baroque and Rococo eras, the grandeur of richly ornamented furniture, tapestries and emphasis on decorative objects sees the continued creation of equally opulent dollhouses and room-boxes.[4] In the 19th century in the age of the Arts and Craft, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco

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[1] Kelly Richman-Abdou, "Tracing the History of Decorative Art, a Genre Where 'Form Meets Function,'" My Modern Met, August 8, 2019, https://mymodernmet.com/decorative-art/#:~:text=Decorative%20art%20dates%20back%20to,cook%20food%20over%20a%20fire.
[2] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A World of Doll Houses; Ill. with 67 Photographs* (New York, and NY: Gramercy, 1965), 13.
[3] Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses: From the V&A Museum of Childhood* (London, UK: V&A Publishing, 2008), 7.
[4] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A World of Doll Houses; Ill. with 67 Photographs* (New York, and NY: Gramercy, 1965), 73.

movements and styles, organic motifs resume, as well as, an emphasis on luxurious simplicity, whether in form or a nostalgia for traditional production methods. It is during this era of the 1930s that we see the popularization of miniatures with creators and collectors like Francis Glessner Lee, Colleen Moore, Queen Mary of England and Narcissa Thorne. The subject of Thorne's Miniature Period Rooms and miniatures in the discussion of decorative arts history is important considering the increase of contemporary artists and collectors of miniatures and the psychological impact they have on their owners.[5] By examining the fabrication, exhibition, and ideation of the Thorne Miniatures, we can distinguish the room-boxes from others in its class, the research and resources necessary for their fabrication, and the overall themes present in the rooms. Beyond historical predecessors and creation, the psychological dimensions of the miniature are explored in relationship to the microcosm and displacement of desire within creators, collectors, and viewers of miniatures.

In chapter one, the histography of miniatures traces the collection and creation of miniature interiors dating as early as ancient Egypt and into the late 18th century. This chapter focuses on prominent displays such as the early bébé houses, bridal Dutch cabinet houses, and early room-boxes. In looking at these select examples, a base of understanding in terminology and subject matter for the further discussion of the Thorne miniature rooms is established. Miniaturist contemporaries to Thorne and their relationship to Thorne and her work are briefly recognized. In presenting the work of Thorne's contemporaries, it sets a precedent of a popularized, hobbyist art form among women of high social standing in national and

[5] See Conclusion

international 1930s society. Through this histography, the perceived function of each miniature type- was deduced, in that the collecting and creation of this object type exists in a didactic, commonly feminine space, with the intention of self-fashioning, a creative and educational outlet, and affluence in common with trends such as the curiosity or art cabinet of wealthy men.

Chapter two is centered on the research and creation of the Thorne Rooms collections. Period rooms came into vogue 1910s to 1950s as a means of providing the visitor with an immersive environment. The Thorne rooms were particularly efficient in offering the experience of period rooms at a reasonable cost and with increased accessibility. Furthermore, the fact that they were miniature added a sense of novelty in an era that prized exquisiteness in the collection of small decorative objects and precious jewels. The resources and research needed to design select rooms are analyzed both early and late. Including her collaborations with other artists, architects, and the Chicago Women's Exchange. Combined with the themes present in the rooms as collections and what their inclusion may reflect on the period and, thus, Thorne as a connoisseur of taste in interior design.

Chapter Three presents the ideas of consumption, desire, and the overall psychology of their associations with the miniature and, thus, the Thorne Rooms. The psychology of miniatures is explored in detail as objects of luxury, reverie, and temporality. This explores the theories of the microcosmic and what they offer regarding the displacement of desires for depression-era consumers. The miniature room will be discussed as a "microcosm of sanitized history" that touches on such themes as exquisite labor, suspended time, and the roles of identity as both a patron and connoisseur. After establishing the psychological intonations of the miniature, I ask what they offered to Thorne as an individual. Self-described as a “mania” by Thorne, this thesis

speculates what the collection and creation of miniatures fulfilled for Thorne in the insatiable manner she describes it. Entrenching her desire to create in psychoanalytic theory and subconscious desire of nostalgia, achievement and validation. Culminating in presented theories encompassed in her background of engendered, affluent education and how it impassioned and informed her creations.

In concluding this thesis, I place myself back into the viewer's space of the miniature rooms in the year 2022. In this space, I recognize the continued legacy of the Thorne Miniature Rooms and the increased popularity of miniature creation and collection in millennials, Gen Z, and popular consumable media. This increase in younger collectors reflects similar displaced desires, particularly evident after the outbreak of Covid 19. Understanding that miniatures like the Thorne Miniature Rooms will continue to hold and inspire fascination in its viewers and caretakers alike.

# HISTOGRAPHY OF MINIATURES AS CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Narcissa Thorne did not invent the miniature house nor their collection or display. Miniatures houses and contents have a long-held, though little discussed, place in the history of material culture. The earliest miniatures date back to ancient Greek, Roman, and Egyptian civilizations. Archeological excavations in post-war redevelopment London un-earthed Roman bronze and clay miniatures of household objects, furniture, and pottery. [6] It is still being determined whether these miniatures were children's toys and whether they were utilized alone or within unlocated interiors. Within Egyptian civilization, small depictions of miniature interiors have been discovered in tombs. The small rooms primarily depict businesses such as hair-dressers and bake shops and likely were part of religious after-life beliefs (FIG. 3). [7] This chapter intends to reach into early modern history for miniature structures and contents to identify the precedents for Narcissa Thorne's miniature period rooms. This inquiry will involve distinguishing her rooms from dollhouses (a common misconception) and identifying the room-box (an overlooked object-type) as the clearest precedent for her endeavor.

## The Bébé House

The most recognized form of miniature interior and display is the dollhouse. Dollhouse, as a term, implies play, despite early houses often not including figures and having far different functions. Such is the case of Early Late Renaissance bébé houses, called such because they are 'baby' or smaller versions of existing homes and architecture. Early bébé houses were usually reasonably simple wooden cabinets featuring , limited architectural detail. The focus of the tiny

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[6] Nicola Lisle, *Life in Miniature: A History of Dolls' Houses* (Barnsley, PA: Pen & Sword History, 2020), 1.
[7] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A World of Doll Houses; Ill. with 67 Photographs* (New York, and NY: Gramercy, 1965), 13.

homes was the luxury miniature treasures housed inside. The earliest known model belonged to Duke Albert V of Bavaria. In 1557 he commissioned a team of craftsmen to create the Munich Baby House, modeled after his ducal palace.[8] The palace cabinet featured miniature representations of luxury objects owned by the Duke, including an armor room and representative objects such as a miniature lion stationed in its own "lion house," as an armorial lion was featured on the Duke and Bavaria's coat-of-arms.[9] While this house perished in a 1674 fire, we know of its existence due to the accounts of the Duke's councilor, Johann Baptist Fickler's assignment to inventory the Duke's collection of art antiques and curios. In two inventories completed in 1598, the Baby House and its complete contents of the tiny treasures within were indicated.[10] The trend for these miniature architectural cabinets continued to be fashionable among the German aristocracy and wealthy middle classes (FIG. 4). The houses represented their owners' affluence and social standing. As their popularity continued into the 17th century, houses became more accurate in depicting exterior architectural details, and the interiors began to resemble those of their homes.[11]

Beyond functioning as a symbol of wealth, the dollhouse became a tool for the instruction of young women, commencing in the early 17th century. This transition from aristocratic hobby to middle-class pedagogy was due to a demand for the inculcation of domestic skills and household management, especially for wealthy households. This was the domain of the mistress of the house, and it was also her job to educate the servants on how to maintain it

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[8] Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses: From the V&A Museum of Childhood* (London, UK: V&A Publishing, 2008), 7.
[9] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A World of Doll Houses; Ill. with 67 Photographs* (New York, and NY: Gramercy, 1965), 16.
[10]Nicola Lisle, *Life in Miniature: A History of Dolls' Houses* (Barnsley, PA: Pen & Sword History, 2020), 2.
[11] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A World of Doll Houses; Ill. with 67 Photographs* (New York, and NY: Gramercy, 1965), 14–28.

properly. Since few girls were educated to read, the doll house could function as a didactic aid. This usage of the dollhouse was mentioned in Paul von Stetten the Younger's *Commentary on the Copper Engravings (*1765), which showed scenes of the history of Augsburg. In his account, Stetten indicated that baby houses had been intended as instructional aids for girls and servants learning domestic skills since the 1600s.[12] One of the best-known examples of this is Anna Köferlin's House. Little is known of Anna Köferlin, but unlike the wealthy men enjoying the Baby Houses mentioned previously, Köferlin was of a lower status and wealth. [13] When the house was constructed in 1631, Köferlin would charge admission for women and servants to view the house in a didactic manner. While her Baby House has been lost, it is immortalized in a printed woodcut broadsheet attributed to Von Wilckens (FIG. 5). This broadsheet would prompt this educational experience and emphasize the value of learning domestic skills early in life. Later examples of miniature interiors, such as the Dutch cabinet houses and early room-boxes, begin to function as a format for women's creative expression.

## Cabinet Houses

In the late seventeenth century, Amsterdam became central to world trade due to the founding of the Dutch East India Company (1602) and liberation from Spain after the Eighty Years' War (1648). The trading of luxury goods such as spice, silk, tea, coffee, rice, sugar, and wine from Europe, Africa, and Asia created a new class of wealthy merchants and bankers.[14] For wealthy Dutchmen, creating a curiosity cabinet symbolized their and the country's burgeoning

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[12] Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses: From the V&A Museum of Childhood* (London, UK: V&A Publishing, 2008), 9.
[13] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A History of Doll Houses* (New York, and NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 26.
[14] Nicola Lisle, *Life in Miniature: A History of Dolls' Houses* (Barnsley, PA: Pen & Sword History, 2020), 8

economy. The increased wealth and travel of trade brought with it a fascination with exotic art, objects and a desire to establish statements of the owner's success. These "cabinets" generally encompassed an entire room rather than a large curio (FIG. 6). These rooms were private spaces whose audience was primarily male individuals of a similar class to their owners. Many Dutch collectors would organize these tangible objects in a manner mirroring the cosmology of the time[15] They are seen primarily in the groupings of *artificia* and *naturalia* objects.[16] Collections focused on *naturalia* saw shells as the most prominent pieces but would feature objects of astronomy, anthropology, plants, animals, or marine life. The *artificia* included portrait miniatures, artifacts and artwork from Egypt and Italy, classical/antique sculptures emphasizing South American dress, Chinese and Japanese porcelain, and lacquerware.[17] The cabinets often appeared as an amalgamation of such collected objects displayed together to create visual connections. Their owners constructed these connections in service to discussion with the few guests privy to such displays.[18]

For wives of such men, cabinet houses became a lavish and trendy bridal gift. These houses, crafted by expert cabinet makers, constituted a handsome piece of furniture for the parlor. They were often constructed using rare and imported woods, inlaid with ivory and amber, and were painted by noted artists, often featuring a lacquered finish (FIG. 7). [19] the cabinet was generally devoid of furnishings and fixtures when first gifted. The standard gift or dowry for

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[15] Like the engraving by artist Crispin de Passe.
[16] O. R. Impey, Arthur MacGregor, and Th. H. Lunsingh Sheurleer, "Chapter 14 Early Dutch Cabinets of Curiosities," in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2017), pp. 115–120, 115.
[17] Impey, MacGregor, and Sheurleer, *The Origins*, 117.
[18] Nicola Lisle, *Life in Miniature: A History of Dolls' Houses* (Barnsley, PA: Pen & Sword History, 2020), 8
[19] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A History of Doll Houses* (New York, and NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 61.

newlywed ladies is miniatures for such cabinets. With the increased popularity of miniatures, guilds began to create minuscule versions of their full-scale crafts so that a lady might be likely to include pottery, silver, pewter, silk, baskets, and artwork. As these inventories suggest, these were often costly commissions from high-end artisans and professional artists.[20] For the women who owned these cabinets, they became opportunities for expression, a small space where they could enact control over their environment. Women held more autonomy within their miniatures, unlike other commissions and decorations within their households. They could negotiate independently with craftsmen to purchase their tiny furnishings, and the women kept detailed records of commissions and alterations to the cabinet interiors, and noted favore artisans. One such woman was Sara Ploos van Amstel, who kept notebooks devoted to her large walnut cabinet house. The house was fashioned by craftsman Jan Meijer in 1743 and was unusual in that it was continually renovated, even with the size being augmented. Van Amstel recorded a series of purchases, including buying three earlier cabinets from an Amsterdam for 903 florins so she could augment the size of the house.[21] She employed craftsmen to replace pieces, wall tapestries, and ceiling murals and even added entire rooms to her existing cabinet.[22] A particular feature in the van Amstel house is a room cluttered from floor to ceiling with pottery and porcelain, perfect miniature copies of blue and white Delft wares.[23] This art chamber was meant to duplicate the

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[20] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A World of Doll Houses; Ill. with 67 Photographs* (New York, and NY: Gramercy, 1965), 17–18.
[21] Two of these auctioned (and destroyed) cabinets previously belonged to the household of Dutch portrait artist David van der Plaes.
[22] Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses: From the V&A Museum of Childhood* (London, UK: V&A Publishing, 2008), 13.
[23] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A World of Doll Houses; Ill. with 67 Photographs* (New York, and NY: Gramercy, 1965), 37.

effect created by her husband's curious porcelain cabinet (FIG. 8). Within these cabinets, including an art chamber or cabinet of curiosities, was a staple.

The insistence on accuracy and the inclusion of representations of their husband's curiosity cabinets in miniature suggests a didactic display of wealth and fulfillment of desire for an art cabinet or a feminine foil to it.[24] As foils, the cabinet house functioned similarly to its curious counterparts. They were created as elaborate, private showpieces, often housed in a parlor to be opened and admired by guests. Women could also control the viewing of the miniature houses by keeping them closed or covered with curtains until an appropriate time to reveal the tiny spaces to guests. One notable difference to curiosity cabinets was the far more intimate viewing experience. Due to the diminutive scale of the rooms and items, the cabinets encouraged physical closeness to view the minute details. The intimacy of form in viewing and construction appears as an inseparable aspect with miniature objects, a magnification of the mundane.

## The Room-Box

Thornes rooms are not dollhouses or didactic, and the nomenclature of dollhouse dismisses them as an object. I would argue that the source of what she is doing is the roombox. Whether presented in a dollhouse or a cabinet, most miniature displays appear in the encompassed form of a household model of connected rooms. Nevertheless, one other form of display emerged in history, one that Thorne latched onto for her displays: the room-box. The room-box is primarily a French invention with notable Austrian inclusions.[25] Despite this, the

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[24] Note: Another interesting commonality between the curiosity and miniature cabinets is their representations in prints and paintings.

dolls could be presented in room-boxes, some as large as a 1/3 scale. These room-boxes were built like miniature stages, with three walls and a floor. Their windows would contain real glass, papered or tapestry walls, drapery, mirrors, and miniature artwork. Often the room could be folded in on itself and placed in a box with the furnishings, or the room had a fourth "wall" that would fold downwards for an extra floor and back up to make a box for storage. The most represented type of room was the lying-in room (FIG. 9). Lying-in rooms were related to the post-pregnancy practices of many early European countries. The practice facilitated bonding and rest for the new mother and child. Also known as postpartum confinement, the practice could range from two weeks to two months, regardless of medical complications. The new mother was suggested not to get out of bed post-birth for at least nine days and ideally for as many as twenty days. Her female relatives or hired monthly maids would care for her and the new child. Lying in was also a social convention for women. The room would be decorated and strewn with sweet-scented flowers with gifts of wine flagons, candies, and sweets provided by family, friends, neighbors, and other women who came to admire the baby.[26] Miniature representations of such rooms were luxury gifts for new mothers. Only a few such rooms survive due to their delicate materials and their portability. Most are known due to written accounts, like one from the seventeenth century of a gift from Cardinal Richelieu to a Duchess related to the Bouteville family. The Cardinal sent a custom miniature lying-in room with various accoutrements, including tiny fresh flowers for the floor, miniature sweets, and a host of dolls, including; the

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[25] Note that Dollhouses were still present in France but much rarer than roomboxes. The most notable have been lost, such as those owned by Marie Antoinette and her children. Others are seen in the Museé de Decortif as a form of decorative art. France was also better known for their exquisitely detailed dolls, including automaton dolls and the earliest examples of the fashion doll.

[26] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A World of Doll Houses; Ill. with 67 Photographs* (New York, and NY: Gramercy, 1965), 73.

mother and child, a nurse, a servant, and a grandmother. With the mother and child dolls came a miniature wardrobe allowing the figures to be dressed, redressed, and posed in a miniature vignette. For the duchess, this was done daily as a pleasure activity and viewing for mother and guests alike.[27]

One can only write about room-boxes or even didactic miniatures mentioning the extensive Mon Plaisir commissioned by Austrian princess Agusta Dorothea von Schwarzburg-Arnstadt (FIG. 10). Now housed in the Schlossmuseum in Arnstadt, this massive diorama was a miniature town constructed using multiple room-boxes. It was recorded as a way to immortalize Arnstadt in the 1700s. The town and surrounding countryside were constructed using over 26 houses, 84 room-boxes, and 411 dolls.[28] The Princess borrowed and commissioned the funds and services from her court, various artisans, and the Ursuline nuns. The nuns constructed most of the wax figure dolls and their miniature attire. The construction of Mon Plaisir involved hundreds of artisans and plunged the Princess into debt with the number of funds spent on it.[29] Its original designs were immortalized by historian Karl Gröber in a picture book of 30 lithograph plates, with 15 in color, in his booklet *Das Puppenhaus.*[30]

## Thorne and the Modern Miniaturist Legacy

Narcissa Thorne's miniature collecting and creation was part of a legacy of miniaturist collectors of a similar class. Thorne was not only heir to the past of miniatures but actively

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[27] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A World of Doll Houses; Ill. with 67 Photographs* (New York, and NY: Gramercy, 1965), 72.
[28] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A History of Doll Houses* (New York, and NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 260–270.
[29] Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses: From the V&A Museum of Childhood* (London, UK: V&A Publishing, 2008), 9-10.
[30] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A History of Doll Houses* (New York, and NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 262.

participated in a contemporary social class of miniaturists, including Colleen Moore, Francis Glessner Lee, and Queen Mary.

Colleen Moore had a prolific career in the silent film era. Director D.W. Griffith invited her to Hollywood at 15 as a favor to a relative. Her film debut was a small role in 1917's *The Bad Boy*, with her first lead role as Annie in *Little Orphan Annie* (1918). She quickly rose to fame as a popular star of flapper comedies. She personified the flapper girl character with her above-the-knee skirts and bobbed hairstyle, a major fashion trend of the era. As the silent film era drew to a close, Moore transitioned to sound films or "talkies," appearing in pictures such as; *The Power and the Glory* (1933) and *Why Be Good?* (1929), which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Writing. Moore's last film appearance was in the 1934 film *The Scarlet Letter*, where she played the starring role of Hester Prynne.[31] In 1928 Moore found herself in a depressive state, the reason for such undisclosed.[32] Her father, Charles Morrison, encouraged her to divert her attention to her original love of miniatures and fairytales. Moore and her father began the search for artisans and craftsmen to help realize the ideal of the Fairy Castle (FIG. 11).

The castle took seven years to conceptualize and build, the first plans being drawn in 1928 to the completion of the exterior landscaping in 1935. More than a hundred miniature experts worked on the project.[33] Most of these experts were sourced from the special effects department of First National Films, the picture studio that was Moore's main acting contractor. Moore

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[31] "Colleen Moore," Turner Classic Movies, accessed May 4, 2023, https://prod-www.tcm.com/tcmdb/person/134634%7C33642/Colleen-Moore.

[32] It is likely due to the abusive nature of her then-husband, John McCormick. He was a known alcoholic whom Moore had married in 1923, shortly after her box office success film *Flaming Youth*. Portably, she was the subject of much of John's abuse and divorced him in 1930.

[33] Amelie Hastie, "History in Miniature: Colleen Moore's Dollhouse and Historical Recollection," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 48, no. 16 (2001): pp. 113-157, https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-16-3_48-113, 118.

imagined the denizens of the castle; a fairy princess and prince, who were collectors of the Early Fairie period of antiquities, "…King Arthur's Roundtable for the dining room, Sleeping Beauty's bed for the princess's bedroom." This premise established a narrative for the eclectic mixture of fairytales from periods and cultures of the real world. The eclectic collection of famous Fairytale artifacts allowed for a central theme within the dollhouse and further allowance to design rooms with a paired story or cultural folk tale that reflected the room's purpose. Each room constructs a different fairy tale in the included furniture, decorative carvings and bas-reliefs, paintings, and the intricate murals on the walls of most rooms. A tour of the spaces reflects these details of integrating folk tales, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and other imagery of the fantastic. Thorne and Moore were friends made through their shared adoration of miniatures, often sending one another small gifts. For example, in Thorne's Midtown Parlor A33, a tiny metal train and ceramic doll sit idly on the floor, both gifts sent to Thorne by Moore. Moore's castle represents a fantastic history, whereas Thorne's showcases an idealistic series of historic interiors. Both inspire a sense of whimsical interest and luxury in their interiors and materials. However, Moore was not the only miniaturist friend of Thorne, Frances Glessner Lee shared a long-held friendship with the creator of the miniature period rooms.

Frances Glessner Lee created the "Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death." She was an American forensic science pioneer and a wealthy heiress born in 1878 and died in 1962.[34] She is known for her intricate and detailed dioramas known as the Nutshell Studies, which were used for training purposes in forensic investigations (FIG. 12). The Nutshell Studies were a series of

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[34] "Murder Is Her Hobby: Frances Glessner Lee and the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death," Smithsonian American Art Museum, accessed June 11, 2023, https://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/nutshells.

20 dioramas depicting miniature crime scenes. Each diorama was created in a 1:12 scale and featured meticulously crafted details of crime scenes, including accurate depictions of victims, furniture, household items, and other evidence. Lee used her background in legal medicine and her interest in forensic science to create these dioramas as a tool for training investigators in crime scene analysis. The purpose of the Nutshell Studies was to teach investigators how to observe and interpret subtle clues and details at a crime scene. The dioramas were used in training programs at Harvard Medical School and later at the Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.[35] They provided a unique and immersive learning experience, allowing investigators to practice their skills in a controlled and realistic setting. The Nutshell Studies are a testament to Lee's dedication to advancing forensic science and her innovative approach to training investigators. Lee and Thorne were close friends; both participated in the same Chicago social circles, often volunteering at the same events. Beyond their shared social interests was their passion for miniatures. They both hoped to educate their audiences with intricate miniature scenes. While their subject matters rested in differing miniature worlds, their attention to detail was not dissimilar.

Queen Mary, the wife of King George V of the United Kingdom, owned the renowned miniature masterpiece created in the early 1920s. Known simply as Queen Mary's Dollhouse, it was commissioned by Princess Marie Louise, Queen Mary's cousin, as a gift for the Queen, who loved miniatures (FIG. 13). [36] The dollhouse was intended to showcase British craftsmanship,

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[35] Bruce Goldfarb, *18 Tiny Deaths: The Untold Story of Frances Glessner Lee and the Invention of Modern Forensics* (S.l.: Sourcebooks Inc., 2021).
[36] Flora Gill Jacobs, *A World of Doll Houses ; Ill. with 67 Photographs* (New York, and NY: Gramercy, 1965), 63–67.

design, and innovation. The dollhouse was designed by renowned architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, with contributions from various artists, craftsmen, and manufacturers.[37] Lutyens incorporated different architectural styles, materials, and techniques to create a miniature replica of an idealized British country house. Queen Mary's Dollhouse is a 1:12 scale replica. It is an impressive structure, standing about 5 feet tall and 8 feet long, with multiple levels and intricately designed rooms. The interiors of Queen Mary's Dollhouse are meticulously designed and furnished. The rooms feature miniature furniture, decorations, artwork, and functional amenities such as running water, electricity, and a working elevator.[38] The dollhouse showcases the craftsmanship of various skilled artisans and manufacturers. It includes miniature replicas of famous artworks, handcrafted furniture, miniature books, and a working library with tiny volumes by prominent authors. Queen Mary's Dollhouse is closely associated with the British royal family. Queen Mary took a keen interest in the project and oversaw its development. The dollhouse became a treasured possession of the royal family and remains a part of the Royal Collection. However, primarily a private display, Queen Mary's Dollhouse has been exhibited to the public several times. It has been showcased at Windsor Castle and other venues, allowing visitors to marvel at its exquisite details and remarkable craftsmanship. Queen Mary's Dollhouse is a miniature marvel and an important historical artifact. It reflects the artistic and cultural achievements of the early 20th century and serves as a testament to the skill and craftsmanship of the craftsmen involved in its creation. Thorne witnessed the dollhouse on one of her trips to Europe and later caught the attention of Queen Mary through gifts of miniatures sent by Thorne

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[37] Lucinda Lambton, *The Queen's Dolls' House* (London: Royal Coll. Enterprises, 2011), 14.
[38] Lucinda Lambton, *The Queen's Dolls' House* (London: Royal Coll. Enterprises, 2011), 7-11.

and Thorne's exhibitions reaching a level of fame. Three years after Thorne's exhibition at the 1933 Century of Progress Fair, Queen Mary commissioned Thorne to create a miniature version of a room at Windsor Castle.[39] This was meant to mark the planned coronation of Edward VIII . The room Thorne created turned out to be one of her most exquisite examples, which she delivered in person to Marlborough House at the Queen's request. The inclusion and commission of Thorne's miniatures by Queen Mary reflects a contemporary recognition of her skill and the quality of her creations.

The designs of Narcissa Thorne are both heirs to and deviate from the encouraging early developments of miniatures and her contemporaries. Thorne utilizes the room-box format, favored by French collectors, and her expansive display is comparable to that of Princess Dorothea's in the sheer number of rooms. She abandoned most of the elements of the bébé and cabinet houses including the general form of a household and in terms of viewership and purpose in presentation. Thornes's rooms exist as a portrayal, not of her home but exemplary of period interiors. These interiors span an extensive timeline of cultures and feature upper and lower-class representations. She followed a strict 1:12 scale accuracy in most rooms to elevate the art form to one far more illusionary when viewed. The majority of these rooms feature a distinct lack of figural representation due to Thorne's insistence that a doll would diminish the overall illusion provided by the detailed scale. Unlike her predecessors, her rooms did not serve a didactic function of domestic servitude in the manner of the Bébe House, nor did they act as a privatized display of personal wealth. Rather, Narcissa Thorne began as a collector, only to use her initial

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[39] "Narcissa Thorne Black Donates Rooms for Inspiration," The Chicago Community Trust, April 12, 2023, https://www.cct.org/stories/narcissa-thorne-black-donates-rooms-for-inspiration/.

hobby as a tool for research and design, to be enjoyed by a war-weary, generally impoverished depression-era public. All while legitimizing and fulfilling her own creative and educational desires.

## COLLECTION AND CREATION OF THE MINIATURE PERIOD ROOMS

Creating the Thorne Miniature Rooms was no simple feat. Period rooms came into vogue 1910s to 1950s as a means of providing the visitor with an immersive environment. The Thorne rooms were particularly efficient in conveying the difference between period rooms at a reasonable cost and increased accessibility. Furthermore, the fact that they were miniature added a sense of novelty in an era that prized exquisiteness in the collection of small decorative objects and precious jewels. Narcissa Thorne made strategic choices in conceptualizing and fabricating the period room-boxes. Her affluent upbringing was decisive in her later collection and design decisions. The conception of the rooms will be analyzed, with sensitivity to Thorne's historical sources, advisors, techniques, and teams involved in fabrication, including her collaborations with other artists, architects, and the Chicago Women's Exchange. Culminating in an in-depth look at the comprehensive themes seen within the entire series, reflecting Thorne as a connoisseur of taste in interior design. [40]

The miniature collection of Indiana-born Narcissa Thorne (née Niblack) was started and encouraged by her uncle, Rear Admiral Albert Niblack. On his tours abroad in the U.S. Navy, he would purchase souvenirs such as tiny vases, tea sets, and furniture to give to his young niece.[41] More gifts were to follow from her father, who had an important post at the Chicago Title and Trust Company. For example, her parents gave her a cabinet and a four-room dollhouse. Remembering the dollhouse in one of her late interviews, she claimed that it "…offended my

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[40] Segmented by European and American across all three series of room sets.

[41] Sally Sexton Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures* (Chicago, IL: Ampersand, Inc., 2014), 26.

sense of beauty and scale. The dolls sat in stiff discomfort on much too large chairs, and the fact that there was no stairway thoroughly disturbed me."[42] She had an eye for design, even at a young age, and with determination and resources, she was able, by the age of 10, to construct and design her own houses from discarded chocolate boxes and grocery crates. In assembling these boxes, she learned improvisation, adaptation of materials, and scale and proportion. At age 19, she married her childhood sweetheart and fellow miniature enthusiast, James Ward Thorne, the son of George Thorne and co-founder of Montgomery Ward & Co., where he was employed.[43] James encouraged Narcissa's miniature hobby, using his woodworking skills and making dollhouses for her to furnish. Their first dollhouse, a gift for a niece, featured a three-story staircase, a motive she would become particularly attached to as her first dollhouses lacked this feature. The young couple continued to design and create the dollhouses, gifting them to friends and families, each becoming more elaborate than the last.

Well established in Chicago society, the couple engaged in philanthropy and socializing. Narcissa Thorne became an active fundraiser for multiple charitable organizations, and she soon found that her dollhouses could raise money for charity. While Thorne volunteered at numerous charity organizations, yet, two ventures stayed closest to her heart; the Art Institute of Chicago and the Women's Exchange.[44] The Women's Exchange Movement started in 1832 and is one of America's oldest continuously operating charitable organizations.[45] Established in 1893 in Chicago, the exchange hosted bazaars, receptions, and sales events throughout the year as a

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[42] Sally Sexton Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures* (Chicago, IL: Ampersand, Inc., 2014), 28.
[43] Kalmbach, Ibid
[44] Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures*, 91.
[45] Kalmbach, Ibid

means of livelihood or supplemental income for women who were unable to perform work outside of the home. The Chicago Women's Exchange was an asset in Thorne's early miniature design experiments and later with the original rooms. Women's Exchange and Needle and Textile guild members, like Miss Percell, Miss Dorothy Douville and Miss Scott, were attributed to the design and execution of rugs like that found in the Early Georgian Drawing Room (E-7), and upholstery such as the red and white chair in the New England Bedroom (A-13) (Fig 14, 15). Thorne created and donated numerous room-boxes to the bazaars, settings based on children's books, fairytales, and nursery rhymes, like a detailed interior of the Three Bears' home. Alongside these whimsical settings were the early machinations of her historical and multicultural fascinations; a French Bedroom, English Library, French Dining Room, and Formal Salon. These, while highly detailed, did not yet include the lengths of research that her later rooms for the exhibition would.

The other catalyst for her miniature room designs was the Period Room. This exhibition style of carefully fashioned recreations of real or imagined interiors has been around for a half-century in America.[46] The period room and, by extension, the period village were meant to serve the educational motivations of museums while presenting an engaging display concept. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the idea of period rooms spread to several major Museums, including the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection of rooms spanning four centuries of interiors. The Art Institute of Chicago also began to exhibit its furniture collections in period rooms.[47] Thorne found the concept of period rooms

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[46] The Essex Insitute in Salem, Massachusetts, is attributed as the first American Museum to install period rooms as early as 1907.

appealing, seeing how they offered great opportunities for interior design education to students and visitors alike. She also recognized that the full-sized interiors could never create a comprehensive catalogue of European and American interior design, considering most museums or even living history villages would require a large space than could be spared. Thorne began to make miniature period rooms for museums, proportional rooms with authentic furnishings acting as a comprehensive interior design histography that would engage the highly educated design student and the average museum visitor.[48]

## Conceptualization, Research, and Advisors

Interior designers of full-scale spaces face constraints that force choices such as; the size of the room, desires of the client, monetary budget, and materials best suited for aesthetics and function. Thorne did not face these limitations; she was in full control and would depict any size, type, or shape of rooms she wanted. For a woman who claimed that her formal education by a governess and private school did little to extend her knowledge, how could she direct and manage a large-scale project such as an interior design histography? Thorne managed the feat of this project through a combination of self-directed research, collecting reference materials, representations of historic homes and spaces in her travels, and with the aid of a team of craftsmen who helped realize her designs.

In the early 1920s, interior and furniture design was a fairly untouched field, with many of the early books written in the age before photography and only limited travel. In an effort to inform her designs for the miniature period rooms, Thorne dedicated herself to collecting and

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[47] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 14.
[48] Suzanne M. Thorne, *Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne: In the Permanent Collection of the Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona*, 1972, 2.

reading the few books available on historic interiors, architecture, and furniture design. Some of the notable were Edith Wharton's book *The Decoration of Houses*, the Eighteenth century *Gentleman's & Cabinet Maker's Directory* by Chippendale and *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings* and *Glimpses of China and Chinese Homes* by Edward S. Morse. When she could not find books on the subjects, she looked to her collection of color-plated prints and original drawings on period rooms and furnishings. In a 1939 *San Francisco Examiner* story, Thorne's library of interior design was considered one of the best privately-owned libraries in the United States.[49] Alongside these physical sources were the notes taken by Thorne on her travels in America and abroad, during which she would take tours of historic homes, castles, and period rooms. [50] While the complete records on the research and making of the rooms are lost, archives such as the Art Institute of Chicago contain Thorne's lecture notes, sketches and blueprints for the rooms and individual items, and a few reference notes to her research sources (FIG. 16). While, in general, the rooms appear fairly accurate, there was a level of educated guesswork on the part of Thorne. Prior to the late 1920s, interior fashion and tastes altered rapidly; owners of the historical homes changed the furniture and replaced walls and wainscoting. It was rare to find a home, royal or otherwise, that didn't mix periods of furniture and décor. At times these changes could be supplemented and tracked by paintings, drawings, sketches, diaries, letters, ledgers, and inventories that referred to redecoration and the purchase and sales of the household. For Thorne, when holes emerged in her research, she would make educated guesses and combine details so that they would appear as a convincing whole. In the case of the Japanese and Chinese Interiors,

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[49] Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures*, 35.
[50] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 18.

both of these rooms were researched by Thorne using the writings of Edward S. Morris on the interior design of Japan and China. She also sought expertise from Japanese and Chinese design students of the Chicago Art Institute, named T. Shimo[51] and B.L. Deng (FIG. 17, 18, 19). [52]

Thorne relied heavily on hired craftsmen and architecture and design students to create and inform her designs. In archival files from the Chicago Art Institute, many of these contributors' names appear but can be difficult to discern. Some names are cited only by last name or initial, and it is often unclear whether they were hired craftsmen or friends. A man only called "Brundel" is attributed with the creation of over forty furniture pieces for thirteen rooms.[53] Over 569 detailed, scaled drawings of furniture, mirrors, sconces, ottomans, footstools, clocks, and chandeliers are mostly left unsigned. However, they are attributed to the design firm of Boaler, Burchell, and Dillon and draftsman Ralph Wheeler.[54] Francis W. Kramer, a window-display artist, is credited with building the exterior walls and support shelves that fit the entire ninety-five rooms. German sculptor Alfons Weber executed the ornamental carvings in most of the European rooms. Danish-born A.W. Pederson was Thorne's full-time foreman between 1932 and 1939. He worked with Thorne in decorating rooms, painting china, finishing works, and painting the majority of the outdoor scenery. Architectural plans and elevations for at least nine of the European rooms and an American example were signed by prominent Chicago architect Edwin H. Clark. Clark was known for designing important landmarks in Chicago, such as; the

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[51] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne. Golden Gate International Exposition, San Francisco, 1940* (San Francisco: Schwabacher-Frey Co., etc., 1940), 10.
[52] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne. Golden Gate International Exposition, San Francisco, 1940* (San Francisco: Schwabacher-Frey Co., etc., 1940), 12.
[53] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 18.
[54] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 19.

Lincoln Park Administration Building, Winnetka Village Hall, the Brookfield Zoo, and several buildings in the Century of Progress World's Fair.[55]. Clark and other elite craftsman would not normally have been available for hire during a more prosperous era, but the Depression created building slumps and put many skilled craftsmen out of work. This circumstance allowed Thorne to hire fine craftsman to furnish her room designs.

## Fabrication

Eugene Kupjack came to work with Thorne after the completion of her second set of rooms, known as the European rooms. He worked extensively beside Thorne through her series of American rooms and refurbishing rooms after their exhibition. Kupjack and later his children Hank and Ray created a miniaturist company, Kupjack Studios.[56] [57] Kupjack's close professional friendship with Thorne afforded him many of the first-hand accounts given to the Art Institute on how Thorne and her studio operated when planning and fabricating the room-boxes. She spent long hours at her studio every day, and at times there would be thirty rooms at various stages of construction; Thorne had to approve each stage of completion, adding touches of her own hand (FIG. 20). Kupjack listed some of the objects that Thorne made, including furniture, textiles, lighting, artwork, and accessories. Narcissa Thorne designed and made many of the miniature chairs, tables, cabinets, and other pieces of furniture herself. She used traditional woodworking techniques, such as carving and joinery, to create faithful reproductions of their full-sized counterparts.

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[55] Sally Sexton Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures* (Chicago, IL: Ampersand, Inc., 2014), 47.
[56] Sally Sexton Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures* (Chicago, IL: Ampersand, Inc., 2014), 81.
[57] With this company, they continued creating miniature rooms for museum settings, still creating one to two rooms every year in a highly detailed manner representative of the work of Kupjack and Thorne.

Thorne was known for her exceptional skill in creating miniature textiles. She made delicate lace curtains, embroidered carpets, and silk draperies using fine threads and hand-stitching techniques. One exceptional example of Thorne's textile skills is the material used for curtains and bed canopy in the Massachusetts Bedroom (A8) (FIG. 21). the white cotton material is intricately printed with red illustrations of architecture, landscapes, and sailing boats. Meant to imitate the hand-painted cotton toile popularized during the nineteenth century, Thorne had matched the process in miniature. Thorne used a minuscule brush to illustrate the miniature print with impressive detail and consistency akin to factory screen-printed fabric.[58]

Thorne began experimenting with lighting nearing the finish of the first twelve rooms. Thorne had every desire and attempted to make the rooms as convincing as possible. There is real glass within the windows and glimpses into supposed exterior gardens and imagined alternate rooms. Despite this, Thorne took the concept further to include electric bulbs of various luminary tones and sizes to emulate exterior natural light. She utilized brass and resourced materials such as earrings to create tiny lamps, sconces, and chandeliers that were both beautiful and functional.[59] This included the sparse use of GOR (Grain of Rice) bulbs and more prevalently large electric bulbs hidden outside windows.[60] Thorne matched the type of bulb expertly with her room settings. The English Great Hall (E1) features lighting mimicking the golden morning hour; the warm light appears to creep into the recesses of the dark wood paneling decorations, casting the pattern of the tall leaded windows in long shadows, mirroring the tiled floor pattern (FIG. 22). While the golden hour lighting is often the most prevalent,

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[58] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937). 117.
[59] Sally Sexton Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures* (Chicago, IL: Ampersand, Inc., 2014), 48.
[60] Sally Sexton Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures* (Chicago, IL: Ampersand, Inc., 2014), 82.

rooms like the English Drawing Room (E15) and Massachusetts Parlor (A9) exemplify alternate times of day and season. The English Drawing Room is an example of Thorne's Modern Period rooms. The chic room features bright white leather furniture and equally alabaster walls. Contrast is created by the dark night portrayed outside the twin windows. The night is not portrayed as a lack of light; rather, depth is added with a backdrop painted with both black and dark navy. It is then pinpricked with bright yellow and white rectangular cutouts, that calls up the architecture of Clarence Terrace, placing the English Drawing Room in a lavish apartment across Regent's Park (FIG. 23). Within the Massachusetts Parlor, Thorne uses bright white bulbs to suggest the winter season in the setting. Aided by the bare limbs of a tree outside the left window, the shredded paper used as the dusting of snow on its branches is pushed to a blinding white with the lighting cast upon it. This similar harsh light bursts into the parlor, making for a deeply shadowed room, where the details of the painted Grecian landscape on the walls suggest hope for warmer weather (FIG. 24). This lighting, in particular, truly exemplifies Thorne's level of design planning and theatrical place setting for the rooms. The cadence of the bulb expertly recreates the over-exposed brightness that reflects off freshly fallen snow, creating a literal cold light that engages the senses of her viewers.

Thorne also created many of the miniature paintings and prints that hang on the walls of the rooms. She used watercolors and other media to create tiny art reminiscent of the period that each room represents. When she felt she could not accurately represent a piece (particularly portraiture), she would turn to her collection of antique miniature portraits. Most portraits in the series of rooms are miniatures from Thorne's collection. While most rooms feature artwork, the California Hallway (A37) pushes art to the forefront of its design (FIG. 25). In another Modern

room, the restrained furnishings become a background to the numerous replicas of mostly French Modern art. The replicas featured include a gouache painting, *At the Seaside*, by Jean-Victor Hugo, left of the French doors. Right of the doors is a crayon drawing of *Walk in the Forest* by Marie Laurencin. In the curtained window recesses are two bronze appearing sculptures of standing female nudes by John Storrs. On the chimney is an oil still life by Cubist painter Amédée Ozenfant and over the couch, another Cubist in gouache by Fernand Léger. Finally, four watercolors were arranged on each side of the couch by Léopold Survage. Within this room, only the paints of Léger, Ozenfant, and Survage were commissioned to the artists for the space.[61] In addition to the furniture and textiles, Thorne made various other miniature accessories, including books, vases, clocks, and even tiny pieces of food. Thorne was known to repurpose materials, particularly in décor. She may have often used less expensive materials or found creative ways to replicate expensive items using more affordable materials. For example, Thorne was searching for a small tray to complete the Cape Cod Living Room's (A12) toy tea service and could not find one that was the right size. Thorne instead utilized a penny for the tray construction (FIG. 26). Found on a little stool next to a child's chair, Thorne had sanded down the penny to be a smooth surface, then attached a rim to the edge of the coin, making it ready to serve the tiny wood-jointed doll next to it.[62] This example speaks to Thorne's resourcefulness and ability to work creatively when small constraints arose in her project.

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[61] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 178–179.
[62] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 124–125.

## Comprehensive Themes of the Rooms

The entire collection of Thorne Miniature Period Rooms reflects what Thorne deemed useful and attractive to the ideal design students. Her choices as connoisseur and designer reflect what Thorne saw as attractive in historic interiors and what Americans in the 1930s considered desirable. The first set of Thorne rooms featured a mixture of European and American interiors. The number of rooms was supposed to be around 30, with their first exposition at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair Century of Progress Exposition. Later she created the set of 31 European Rooms, and her third and final set was the 37 American Rooms. Each series was exhibited and renewed around America throughout the 1930s and into the early 1940s.[63] They often were exhibited in tandem with one another in efforts to create a comprehensive timeline of period styles. For clarity, the rooms are being analyzed in this thesis as the European series and American series with a focus on a few rooms.

The European rooms equate to about fifty-two rooms spanning from 1300 to the Modern 1930s. The rooms include rooms from the original First Set of thirty rooms and the Second Set of strictly European rooms. Most of the rooms feature English and French design eras, with inclusions of Italian, Spanish, German, and a few outliers often unceremoniously grouped within the European rooms. The twenty-four English period rooms span dates from 1300 to 1930, with a heavy emphasis on styles of the English Georgian period. Eleven of the rooms exemplify this period, but not all Georgian rooms showcase the particular style of the period. Thorne chose to represent alternative styles that were present during this era, including the designs of George

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[63] Suzanne M. Thorne, *Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne: In the Permanent Collection of the Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona*, 1972, 26.

Hepplewhite.[64], Thomas Sheraton and Chippendale. [65] [66] Thorne similarly treats the four Jacobean rooms, emphasizing the English Reception Room as being in the style of Inigo Jones and her English Drawing Room as having Dutch influences as understood by the William and Mary style.[67] The Chippendale interiors are even more specified, portraying the Chinese Chippendale style with designs borrowed from Eastern forms and imagery within a Western design understanding (FIG. 27).

The Early English Gothic, Tudor, Queen Anne, Victorian, Regency, and Modern periods are sparse in representation; each only has singular rooms in the style or two rooms as representation. The two periods featuring double representation are that of the Queen Anne and the Victorian. The representation of the Victorian period as more than a singular room is interesting, considering that the Victorian style in 1930s America was considered dated and unfashionable. Thorne, however, found the style charming, with its inclusion functioning beyond the comprehensive interior design history she set out to make, and became one of many personal ventures within the long-standing project. Due to the negative reaction to the period style, Thorne found it incredibly difficult to obtain accurate research regarding Victorian rooms. Even in England, very little was being written on the subject.[68] Thorne desired to update her original Victorian parlor, constructed mainly from her collection of miniature Victorian furniture, the

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[64] Mrs. James Ward Thorne, *Architectural Models: Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne* (Boston, MA: Worlds Fair of New York, 1940), 9.
[65] Mrs. James Ward Thorne, *Architectural Models: Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne* (Boston, MA: Worlds Fair of New York, 1940), 9.
[66] Thorne, *Architectural Models* Boston, MA: Worlds Fair of (New York, 1940), 8-10.
[67] Thorne, *Architectural Models* Boston, MA: Worlds Fair of (New York, 1940), 3-4.
[68] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 58.

new room being featured in her Second Set of European rooms at a higher quality and standard (FIG. 28).

The French rooms are the second most prominent in the European Room series, with eighteen rooms from 1500 to the 1930s. The French interiors feature singular inclusions of design of the eras of Louis XII, Francis I, the Empire period, and an attractive Art Nouveau Modern Library. The Periods of Louis XIV and the Directoire or Revolutionary period follow a similar pattern as other dueted rooms, with a representative design and a secondary style or room type. The secondary Louis XIV Dining room represents the Mansard style, while the Directoire Boudoir and Bath is notably the only bathroom to be featured in any interior (FIG. 29). The French styles that receive the most attention are those of the reign of Louis XV at six and Louis XVI at four. One room is shared between the two periods, a dining room modeled after the one at Fontainebleau Palace (FIG. 30).[69] While English and French styles are the most featured cultures, Thorne included examples of German, Spanish, and Italian interiors. The German interiors included a Biedermeier-style sitting room and a German Baroque hallway. The hallway was dismantled shortly after its display, and its pieces were recycled into other rooms. It was modeled after a little-known castle known as the Schloss Marquardsburg.[70] The Biedermeier room was personally endearing to Thorne, much like the English Victorian Period. She adored that the style was named for an imagined character of a satirical German periodical. Thorne was

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[69] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 78–79.
[70] Mrs. James Ward Thorne, *Architectural Models: Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne* (Boston, MA: Worlds Fair of New York, 1940), 30.

never quite satisfied with this room, consistently adding more objects to the space to represent the exuberant and cluttered style (FIG. 31). [71]

The Spanish interiors were the most varied, with a Renaissance, 17th Century, and most notably, the Majorican room. The Majorican room is set in Thorne's contemporary 1930s era and is one of only three rooms with a figure.[72] The Italian Rooms were positioned in the High Renaissance, differentiating between Italian and Venetian. The beginning of the Miniature Room project was the Venetian Room, where in Rome, Thorne came across six miniatures that became the nucleus of the room (FIG. 32). They had originally belonged to an Italian noblewoman whose items had been heirlooms. These six pieces included the two bronze chandeliers, set with semi-precious stones, the bronze console tables on either side of the exterior-lit doorway, and the two polychrome busts flanked by window curtains on their pedestal stages. This room began the First Set of miniature Period rooms, whose interiors were primarily filled with miniatures from Thorne's personal collection.

The American Rooms follow a different pattern than to their European counterparts. Rather than Thorne ascribing specific styles to these forty-seven rooms, most are attributed to the state where the designs are most common, starting in 1675 and ending in 1940. Most rooms were copied directly from real American residences and house museums that Thorne and her husband toured for her research. The American rooms are where the taste-making choices of Thorne are truly seen, as the majority of states represented in the interior designs are

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[71] Mrs. James Ward Thorne, *Architectural Models: Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne* (Boston, MA: Worlds Fair of New York, 1940), 29.
[72] The other two include the Breton Kitchen and Early American Kitchen.

those of New England and Southern America. Six rooms were attributed to Massachusetts, spanning from 1675 to 1818, and eight were attributed to Virginia from 1708 to 1800. Cape Cod, New Hampshire, New York, Connecticut, Maryland, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Louisiana, Tennessee, Georgia, and Pennsylvania are all represented, with Pennsylvania featuring a specified Shaker Style Room (FIG. 33). A few South Western rooms, attributed to New Mexico and California, are included, but most of the mid-western and Northwestern states are excluded from this "comprehensive" design. Thorne and the perceived students of design who would be utilizing these rooms in conjunction with their studies saw these states and their styles as representative of the American Interior style. The American Rooms feature the largest number of Modern Rooms in all three Period Room Sets. The inclusion of Modern Rooms was one unique to Thorne's design. Full-scale period rooms typically represent popular historical periods of bygone eras of luxury. The inclusion of Modern interiors from America, England, and France exemplified Thorne's desire to inform students of interior design. Not every American customer wanted a historical French salon. Instead, they might follow in the footsteps of apartments that Thorne saw and visited at her home on Lake Shore Drive, sleek modernist designs imported from Parisian designers (FIG. 34).

## Educational Expectations

Thorne consistently claimed to make the Thorne Miniature Rooms to inform students of design, yet rarely spoke to how she imagined this exchange of knowledge. It is known that she hoped that these meticulously crafted dioramas would serve as a source of inspiration and practical learning for aspiring designers. Yet what are some ways she might have envisioned students utilizing her intricate miniature rooms as educational tools? Thorne could have likely

hoped that students studying interior design could use the miniature rooms to analyze and understand various design principles and concepts. They could observe the use of space, color schemes, furniture arrangement, and architectural details within each room to gain insights into creating harmonious and "tasteful" interiors. She could have desired students to use these rooms as visual references for understanding the design styles and aesthetics prevalent during specific eras or regions. Students could explore the period-specific furniture, decor, and architectural elements to gain a deeper appreciation of the historical and cultural context of design. The miniature rooms could provide students with a hands-on understanding of scale and proportion. They could examine how furniture, objects, and architectural features relate to each other in the context of a room. They could also experiment with rearranging and modifying the elements within the miniature rooms to see the impact on overall visual balance and proportion. The attention to detail and craftsmanship would have provided an opportunity for students to closely examine the materials, textures, and finishes used in the miniature rooms. By studying the intricate workmanship, students could gain insights into various techniques, such as woodworking, upholstery, metalwork, and textile artistry, which could inform their own material choices and craftsmanship skills. Thorne might have hoped instructors would encouraged students to engage in design problem-solving exercises using the miniature rooms or ones like them. Students could be challenged to re-imagine or adapt the rooms for different purposes, such as converting a traditional room into a modern space or creating a functional layout within a limited area. This would foster creativity, critical thinking, and practical application of design principles. Overall, Narcissa Thorne's intention for how her miniature rooms were to be used as an educational tool are not referenced explicitly by their author. Despite this, the rooms and

miniatures as a medium could be a valuable resource for students of design, offering them a unique and tangible platform to explore and learn about various aspects of interior design, history, craftsmanship, and problem-solving in a visually captivating manner. Despite the possibilities and intention for education, no clear cases for their usage in curriculum have been recorded, whether in the era of their creation or contemporaneously. While the rooms have no record in curriculum, their positioning in the museum setting presents the opportunity for instruction and education. Tours presented by guides, the available audio tours, to passive viewership all present opportunities for educational exploration, whether that stops at the museum exit or continues into self-instruction.

While Thorne's comprehensive miniature period rooms did not cover every period, culture, or the like, the expanse and variety were a feat of craftsmanship and collection. The level of intricacy for the Thorne miniature rooms would be difficult to contest, it's more a wonder why Thorne devoted so much time, money, and energy to their creation. She was not the only miniaturist of this era, yet, her chosen subject for her miniatures and her manner of exhibition differ substantially; they serviced something within herself and the audience she exhibited to. Something psychologically that seems to draw collectors, creators, and viewers alike to miniatures.

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DESIRE IN MINIATURES

The Thorne miniature rooms were an exhibition sensation. Each miniature room produced by Thorne and her team toured America, and viewers were fascinated by them. After viewing Thorne's exhibitions, many individuals were inspired to collect and create their own miniatures. Why would they be met with such enthusiasm? What did they mean to a Depression Era audience? The Thorne rooms and miniatures fill a psychological desire for control, safety, and authenticity. In this chapter, the miniature room will be discussed as a "microcosm of sanitized history" that effectively touches on such themes as exquisite labor, the suggestion of suspended time, and the capacity to identify as a patron and connoisseur.[73]

## Authentic Experience and Exhibition

During the 1930s, the Thorne miniature rooms gained recognition and were exhibited in various venues, showcasing Narcissa Thorne's remarkable craftsmanship and attention to detail. These exhibitions allowed a wider audience to appreciate her miniature creations' intricacy and historical accuracy. One notable Thorne Miniature Rooms exhibition occurred at the 1939 New York World's Fair.[74] The fair was a significant event that showcased technological advancements, cultural displays, and artistic achievements worldwide. The Thorne Miniature Rooms were featured in the "Century of Progress" exhibition, which aimed to depict the progress of civilization throughout history.[75] Thorne's miniature rooms were displayed alongside other

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[74] With heavy reference to the writings of Susan Stewart, a poet, translator, and literary critique who wrote extensively on the nature of scale, collection, consumption, and desire.
[74] Suzanne M. Thorne, *Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne: In the Permanent Collection of the Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona*, 1972.

historical and architectural exhibits, emphasizing their place within a larger narrative of human development. This exhibition allowed viewers to engage with the Thorne miniature rooms and appreciate their historical accuracy, attention to detail, and aesthetic appeal. The rooms provided visitors with a sense of nostalgia and wonder. The Thorne miniature rooms appeal to visitors because they offer an authentic experience of reduced-scale space. Susan Stewart, a poet and literary critic who wrote extensively on the nature of scale, collection, and desire, has proposed that authentic experience is being "placed beyond the horizon of present lived experience" in an environment "in which the antique, the pastoral, the exotic, and other fictive domains are articulated."[76] In this condition, authenticity is a desire for idealized spaces of pleasure that, in their removal from the viewer by scale and protection, encourages us to imagine existence within these spaces. This authenticity is seen in entertainment media like books, theatre, and film. In the experience of watching a film or play, for example, the audience maintains a distance from the image through the physical boundaries of stage and screen, which is the precondition for projecting themselves into the narrative.[77]

Viewers in the 1930s would have seen the Thorne miniature rooms as a means for transporting themselves to different eras and experiencing a form of displacement from their present lives. The attention to detail, craftsmanship, and historical presentation of the rooms would have contributed to the perceived authenticity of these miniature spaces. For the Depression Era audience, there was an increasing appreciation of nostalgia and the past,

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[76] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C: Duke Univ. Press 2007, 2007), 133.
[77] Amelie Hastie, “History in Miniature: Colleen Moore's Dollhouse and Historical Recollection,” *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 16, no. 3 (2001): pp. 113-157, https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-16-3_48-113, 114.

particularly with the rise of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which privileged "honest" medieval construction methods and interest in historical preservation. This movement often celebrated the aesthetics and values of the past, promoting a sense of nostalgia and an appreciation for historical design and craftsmanship.[78] Combined with this movement, there was an increasing interest in historic preservation and the restoration of significant buildings and landmarks. This focus on preserving the past and valuing historical authenticity was evident in various cultural and societal movements of the time.[79] The Thorne miniature rooms tapped into this "cult of authenticity" by offering viewers intricately designed and historically accurate representations. The rooms would have also appealed to the popular desire for idealized spaces of pleasure and history. By engaging with the Thorne miniature rooms, viewers could imagine themselves in these meticulously crafted worlds and create narratives within the historical settings. They would have catered to the desire for idealized spaces and offered a means of engaging with the past, aligning with Susan Stewart's notion of displacement and the allure of imagined spaces, thus deeming them authentic in the experience of viewing them.

## Exquisite Labor

Miniaturization is a skill, and the intimate nature of its size and creative process enhances the viewer's perception of the exquisite craftsmanship of the object. Objects we may overlook are quite literally magnified in the craftsperson's imagination and the collector's desire. Consider furniture details in the Massachusetts Drawing Room (A-5) at the Chicago Art Institute (FIG.

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[78] Monica Obniski, "The Arts and Crafts Movement in America: Essay: The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History," The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, January 1, 1AD, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acam/hd_acam.htm.
[79] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 15.

35). The walnut burl secretary desk in the right-hand corner features a secret compartment and can be opened and closed with pinhead-sized ivory knobs. The tall case clock in the left-hand corner has functioning mechanisms, telling accurate time until it needs to be opened and wound.[80] The door locks can be turned by tiny keys in the Louis XVI Salon (E-4), and numerous readable miniature books are resting on parlor tables or shelves (FIG. 36). [81] Such attention to the functional qualities of these items indicates that both maker and collector value the use value as a sign of authenticity. Individuals who discover the functionality of these minuscule objects are overcome with delight, possibly a fraction of the delight enjoyed by the craftsman and collector who got to determine the placement, style, and use as part of a reassuring illusion of a fixed environment.[82] Yet, while the clock can wind, no one will seek it to reference the time. The locks can be locked, but no one would hang a key the size of a grain of rice on their keyring. One may be able to read the books, but one larger is certainly more comfortable than reading Lincoln's Gettysburg Address under a magnifying glass (FIG. 37). [83] So it is strange to imagine how we might find such fascination with something that, while made to be useful in miniature, is essentially useless. These demonstrations encapsulate many physical representations of time, labor, and use.[84] Viewers recognize the skill needed to make a 1:12 scale clock wind and chime

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[80] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 108–109.
[81] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 20.
[82] Susan Scheftel, "Welcome to the Dollhouse," Psychology Today (Sussex Publishers, September 29, 2015), https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolving-minds/201509/welcome-the-dollhouse.
I found this not only from the psychological analyses by Scheftel but also from the numerous reactionary letters on file with the Art Institute of Chicago and in my exploration of the exhibit. Several visitors noted me, a young woman juggling a dog-eared catalog, Thorne's biography, and a ragged notebook. (Especially when I spend over twenty minutes in front of one box referencing said catalog and taking photographs of details) I had several people politely ask me questions. I enjoyed sharing information not found on the scant labels beneath the boxes, but one note always seemed to excite visitors: the tiny functional objects.
[83] The New York City Parlor A15 features a book that has the entire Gettysburg address readable within it.
[84] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C: Duke Univ. Press 2007, 2007), 38-39.

but the idea of tiny objects that "work" fulfills their role as replicants of reality. Use value becomes display value, and the relationship to the visual experience of authenticity improves the display value.

## Souvenir and Collection

Whether traveling within her own country or abroad, Thorne actively sought out small shops and establishments, diligently scouring them for miniatures or objects that could be transformed into miniatures. Her dedication to her craft led her to explore various locales for unique and captivating pieces to add to her collection. Thorne's quest for miniatures took her to both national and international destinations, allowing her to immerse herself in different cultures and uncover treasures from different eras. Thorne's enthusiasm for collecting miniatures was driven by the act of acquisition and the artistic and creative process of translating ordinary objects into exquisite, detailed replicas. Her discerning eye and meticulous attention to detail made her collection a remarkable display of craftsmanship and imagination.

Through her travels and relentless pursuit, Thorne assembled a grand collection of miniatures, each representing her passion, dedication, and the stories of the places she visited. Particular objects would influence her choices of designing rooms, even breaking her personal rules at times to include them. As with the three rural kitchen settings; The Breton Kitchen, Early American Kitchen, and Majorcan Kitchen. Around the creation of the Second Set of period rooms in 1935, Thorne was adamant about not using dolls or figures in her rooms. [85] It was her belief that the inclusion of dolls cheapened the illusion that the interiors created. A doll also denoted the rooms more as detailed playthings than the architectural models they were intended

[85] 31 European Rooms of Various Periods

as. Yet, three rooms in her First Set can be seen populated with singular dolls, Each a lower-class kitchen of varied periods and cultures, each manned by a hard-working maid. Within most of her early exhibitions, catalogs Thorne does not mention the reason for their inclusion save for the Breton Kitchen (FIG. 38). In the 1940 Golden Gate International Exposition Catalogue, Thorne regales a tale of a motor trip through Normandy and Brittany in which she spent three days on the island of Mont St. Michel. She toured the Breton craftsman, purchasing and commissioning miniature furniture and brass wares for the room. Thorne notes more than once the Breton housewives in their "exquisite organdy caps and padded skirts" alongside her descriptions of the furniture wares.[86] She bought the Breton woman figure alongside her other miniature purchases as though the room could not be complete without the woman's figure by the fireplace. It seems in the Breton Kitchen, as well as the kitchens of Early America and Majorcan, the women working arduously by their fireplaces are just as representative of the interior as the furniture itself. Thorne was known to break rules she had set out for herself in her collection and displays, but including dolls was by far the most jarring. As Thorne had predicted, these rooms with included dolls lose their illusionary aspects and move from the realm of interior architectural models and more towards wealthy display practice, not unlike the cabinet house.

Yet the story of discovering the Breton woman doll speaks to the collector's desire to possess it. This possession can be souvenirs of experience, bringing home objects from travels or events to which individuals attach the experience. A physical representation of our body has been present in the space exemplified by the object, which can be traced back to our nostalgic

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[86] James Ward Thorne, Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne. Golden Gate International Exposition, San Francisco, 1940 (San Francisco: Schwabacher-Frey Co., etc., 1940), 9.

memories upon viewing the object. Thorne used miniatures as these souvenirs, seeking them out, delicately packing them in their own designated trunks, and upon return home, protecting and arranging the miniatures in representations of interiors. Protection and ownership are the most appropriate understanding of her collection. Miniatures encourage a level of protection in their owners due to their diminutive size. This protective desire comes from perceiving the object as "cute" or "exquisite."

The human mind associates objects to itself as body and then seeks connections between body and nature. In this manner, when a person views a miniaturized Chippendale chair, our brains connect it to ourselves in scale and then to something equally diminutive in nature. Often this association is imaginative in the manner of recognizing use value. We recognize that our body cannot utilize this chair, so we imagine what body could. In this manner, the human mind may associate with non-human bodies, such as rabbits, chicks, mice, or the like.[87] In this manner, the reaction to the tiny chair is that it is "cute," and its delicate nature and associations with meek forms of life are exemplified in favor of its protection. Or an individual can look at the same miniature Chippendale chair and recognize the exquisite labor in its creation. In connecting it to exquisite smallness, the mind will associate it with other objects of a similar nature, such as precious stones or gems. In this association, the value associated with a gemstone is juxtaposed with the miniature and the desire to protect a valuable object. We cannot know exactly how Thorne perceived her protection of the objects in her collection. One can surmise that Thorne viewed her miniatures in a protective manner of value and endearment. Thorne furthers her collection mania, preferring to create and exhibit for an audience beyond that of her household.

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[87] Sally Sexton Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures* (Chicago, IL: Ampersand, Inc., 2014), 112.

Rather, she chose to invest money and time in creating and displaying the projects to a national audience.

## Thorne's Microcosm

While miniatures offer a form of authentic experience for their viewers, for their creators, they present an avenue for self-fashioning, representation, and fulfillment of desire. The act of collecting and creating miniatures encourages an opportunity to exercise control over a compact space and express their creativity within its constraints. The scale allows for precise manipulation and arrangement of elements, granting a sense of mastery and control over the created environment. Miniature enthusiasts can carefully curate every detail, from furniture placement to decor, allowing them to shape and design their idealized version of reality on a miniature scale. Creators have the autonomy to manipulate representation, crafting their idealized version of reality in a tangible and tactile form. This process allows individuals to manifest their vision and desires, creating a space that reflects their aesthetics, nostalgia, or aspirations. Furthermore, the liminal or suspended time of the miniature world contributes to its unique appeal. Miniatures often depict a frozen moment or a specific period, offering a sense of suspended reality. This temporal suspension creates a distinct experience for both creators and viewers, allowing them to immerse themselves in a miniature realm that exists outside the flow of time. The miniature space becomes a haven where one can temporarily escape the constraints and pressures of the real world. The self-authenticating nature of miniatures is also significant. Creators have the autonomy to manipulate representation, crafting their idealized version of reality in a tangible and tactile form. This process allows individuals to manifest their vision and desires, creating a space that reflects their aesthetics, nostalgia, or aspirations.

Thorne's collection and subsequent creation of miniature rooms are informed by her research but also, her opinions and desires, with some rooms featuring interiors that fulfill Thorne's own desires of nostalgia and self-representation. These miniature rooms became extensions of her self-fashioning and provided her with a means of artistic and personal fulfillment. One can recognize grand collections as somewhat compulsory for their owners. As with other collectors, Thorne was not removed from this compulsion, even referring to her collecting of miniatures as a "mania."[88] Yet beyond the extensive collection, Thorne's decision to exhibit her collection to the public rather than keeping it within the confines of her household could be driven by several speculative motivations and potential goals. Combining psychoanalysis with the previously outlined theories on the nature of the miniature within the psyche of humanity, the fulfillment of a deeper desire is entirely plausible. These are speculative hypotheses, and it is crucial to approach them cautiously, as only Thorne herself could truly reveal the motivations behind her collecting behavior. If we were to approach an analysis of Thorne's collecting behavior from a psychanalytic perspective, we could explore the concept of unconscious desires and potential psychological lacks. Psychoanalysis proposed that individuals have unconscious desires and wishes that influence their behavior. In the case of Thorne, her passionate and compulsive collecting of miniatures could be seen as a manifestation of unconscious desires and wishes.[89] It is possible that her collection served as a means of fulfilling unmet or repressed desires that she may have been unaware of or unable to express consciously.

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[88] Sally Sexton Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures* (Chicago, IL: Ampersand, Inc., 2014), 112.
[89] Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, "Psychoanalysis," essay, in *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 174–98.

We have acknowledged several aspects of desire fulfillment miniatures offer, most of which could be applied and asked of Thorne. Escapism and fantasy, control and order, connection and belonging, or emotional fulfillment. Collecting and creating miniatures can offer a means of escaping from reality and immersing oneself in a world of imagination. Thorne may have used her collection as escapism, creating miniature worlds that allowed her to fulfill desires or experiences that she felt were lacking in her own life. Miniatures can provide a sense of control and order in a world that may feel chaotic or unpredictable. Thorne's compulsive and protective ownership of her miniatures suggests a need for control and a desire to create a structured environment. This may indicate a personal lack of control or stability in other areas of her life. A want for a nonexistent past.  A subconscious reflection of an interior lack with self and a need for recognition and validation from others.

Thorne may have held a want similar to her viewers, a want for an era of nostalgic luxury or simplicity. By nature, and era that exists only within the mind and thus the miniature. One room exemplifying this is the Middletown parlor (FIG. 39). Named after a 1929 sociological study of a typical small city by Robert and Helen Lynd[90], it is the only representation of Thorne's home state of Indiana. The room seems to act as a representation of a childhood nostalgia rather than a fashionable interior to study. She wrote of the room, saying, "It makes you feel as though you were visiting your grandmother."[91] The room appears to have a careful poignance, including a lazy morning light streaming from the bay window fitted with Gothic Revival frames. This light falls on a room that feels particularly loved and lived within, a hat on the hall tree, displays

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[90] Thorne christened the room with this unusual title because of the study in Muncie, Indiana. (Fig. 38)
[91] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 170–171.

of accumulated family treasures and bric-a-brac, and even a Chicago Tribune sat within the paper rack, a nod to Thorne's connections to Chicago. The most delightful additive to the room is the minuscule metal toy steam locomotive and antique jointed doll. Not only do they suggest being left by a flighty child, but the two-piece were gifts from long-time friend and fellow miniaturist; actress Colleen Moore, and supposedly, other gifts from miniaturists friends like Francis Glessner are held within the room.[92] The tiny gifts add to the personal attachment of Thorne to the nostalgic fantasy of Middletown.

Narcissa Thorne's meticulous research and creation of her miniatures may reflect her unconscious need to exert control over her environment, potentially as a means of managing anxiety or feelings of insecurity. Thorne would be perceived to have been blessed with 20th-century life. She had a fortunate childhood, both in wealth and familial relationships. Later in life, she continued to have wealth, a seemingly healthy and supportive husband and was toted with a reputation of beauty and generosity within the social stratosphere of Chicago. From this perception, it would seem that Thorne should have no lack within her past or present to have inspired the self-titled mania of the Thorne miniature Rooms. However, Thorne posited a self-perceived lack within her lifetime, that of her education. In the 1930s, women in America received various levels of education, but the opportunities available to them were still limited compared to those available to men. Girls received primary and secondary education similar to boys. However, the curriculum often reflected traditional gender roles, emphasizing domestic skills for girls and vocational or academic pursuits for boys. Girls were typically not encouraged

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[92] James Ward Thorne, *Miniature Rooms* (Chicago: Art Institute, 1937), 171.

to pursue higher education, as gender bias during the era discouraged them from pursuing higher education or certain fields of study. The prevailing belief was that women's primary role was within the home, and their education should primarily focus on preparing them for marriage and motherhood. Despite this prevailing idea, women did have a level of access to higher education. Their enrollment in colleges and universities was lower compared to men. Many women attended women's colleges or coeducational institutions, but prestigious universities such as Harvard and Yale did not admit women until later decades. Women's colleges played a significant role in women's education during this period. These institutions, such as Smith College, Mount Holyoke College, and Wellesley College, offered women a chance to receive a quality education, often with a focus on liberal arts and social sciences. In the realm of vocational schools, nursing and teaching colleges were among the few options available to women who sought specific career training.[93]

In the case of Thorne a governess provided her early education till age eleven, when she briefly entered public school, only to attend a private school for most of her schooling, including the Kenwood Institute finishing school. Despite this list of primarily private education, Thorne's posited, “The trouble with my childhood was that I was given no education. Knowing how to put my hat on straight was supposed to be enough.”[94] Such a quote more than suggests a dissatisfaction with the educational opportunities she received during her formative years. This simple comment may indicate that she may have desired a more comprehensive and substantial education beyond surface-level skills and focused on intellectual growth and knowledge

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[93] Patsy Parker, “The Historical Role of Women in Higher Education,” *Administrative Issues Journal Education Practice and Research* 5, no. 1 (2015), https://doi.org/10.5929/2015.5.1.1.
[94] Sally Sexton Kalmbach, *Mrs. Thorne's World of Miniatures* (Chicago, IL: Ampersand, Inc., 2014)

acquisition. She may have felt inadequate or had a desire for knowledge and intellectual enrichment that she believed her formal education did not provide. While Thorne may have enjoyed material wealth, familial relationships, and social standing, her perceived lack of education could have stemmed from a desire for intellectual fulfillment, a sense of accomplishment, or a yearning to broaden her horizons. It could have motivated her to seek out alternative avenues for learning and self-improvement, such as her passion for collecting miniatures and the meticulous research and historical accuracy she put into creating the Thorne Miniature Rooms. The rooms may have served as a means for Thorne to channel her intellectual curiosity and creative energies, offering her a platform for self-expression and the pursuit of knowledge. In the exhibition of the rooms she received recognition, not only the detail of her designs but perceived accuracy of such. Such validation was not only presented by the general audience, but by celebrities like Walt Disney and Queen Mary of England. Thorne received further recognition from design institutes such as the Chicago Art Institute and IBM. Thorne consistently toted that she began the project to create a comprehensive catalogue of miniature interiors to be utilized students of design to study, reference and inform their own work. In meticulously researching, recreating and exhibiting her miniature period rooms, Thorne may have found a way to immerse herself in the world of art, architecture, and history, compensating for what she perceived as her lack of desired education, presenting her work for the validation of her research, and create a lasting collection to inform contemporary and future students of design.

Or maybe that quote was simply a quip made in jest rather than derision. As it could also be argued that the education Narcissa Thorne received was not only typical for the time, but

aided and informed her work in the Thorne Miniature Rooms. Specifically her education in the Kenwood Finishing School. Finishing schools were institutions that focused on teaching social skills and etiquette to young women, particularly those from affluent backgrounds. The aim of these schools was to prepare women for their roles in high society, including marriage, hosting social events, and engaging in polite conversation. Finishing schools emphasized refinement in areas such as manners, grooming, poise, elocution, fashion, and cultural pursuits like art, music, and dance. The curriculum often included subjects like social etiquette, proper table manners, how to dress appropriately for different occasions, and even instruction on how to manage a household staff. Participation in finishing schools was typically seen as a way for young women to enhance their marriage prospects and social standing. Attending a finishing school was considered a marker of prestige and refinement. As such these schools often made a practice of taste-making or the goal to educate young women in matters of taste and refinement. Finishing schools sought to cultivate a sense of cultural sophistication and an understanding of what was considered tasteful and fashionable during that time. This included “appreciation” training in music, literature, current events, and art. They were encouraged to appreciate and engage with high culture, which could include attending theater performances, art exhibitions, and concerts. They would also be encouraged to learn “fashionable” languages such as French. This taste-making education emphasized an appreciation for certain kinds of art, while excluding others. The programs toted Western European works such as; Classical art, particularly from ancient Greece and Rome, the works of Renaissance and Baroque artists, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Caravaggio, and Titian, paintings and sculptures executed in a realistic and academic style, landscape paintings, particularly those depicting serene and picturesque

scenes, and in the 1930s, the works of impressionist artists like Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Edgar Degas were considered aesthetically pleasing. The art considered tasteful in finishing schools largely reflected the mainstream artistic canon of the time.[95]

Understanding the kind of education Thorne received its elements are reflected heavily in much of her own work. Even in her desire to educate students of design, such a statement could be a reference not to the design students at the Institute of Chicago, but rather for the heads of the households these designs may be implemented in: women. With this theory, Thorne isn't attempting to raise herself to the level or above her male design and historian counterparts. Rather she is rising to a level of fame within the societal constraints of her gender, intent on exemplifying the standards of taste-making she has been taught. With this theory, Thorne's choice to exhibit at World's Fairs makes more sense. Her desire would be to reach more women and inform them on how to appropriately design their homes, while gaining some notoriety herself. With this proposition it is interesting that she attempts to bring in a level of American regionalism. Positioning American New England and Southern interior design at the same level of taste as those of historical European luxury interiors. In this manner Thorne is adding to the education of aesthetics and art appreciation, positing that certain regional styles are appropriate additions to the education of taste.

Only Thorne can recognize the true intentions, conscious or subconscious, for her drive to create the Thorne Miniature Rooms. Whether a drive informed by a perceived lack of control due to the societal circumstances presented to an affluent women in the 19th Century or in part

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[95] Eliza McGehee and Emily Westkaemper, "Educating the Modern Woman: Girls' College Preparatory Schools in Virginia, 1900-1930" (thesis, n.d.).

due to the education of taste-making and fashion, the result is a set of 68 meticulously crafted miniature period room interiors.

## THE LEGACY OF NARCISSA THORNE'S MINIATURE PERIOD ROOMS

I believe Thorne would be pleased with the continued legacy of her miniature period rooms today. When I visited the Thorne Rooms in the summer of 2022 the basement gallery was not remiss of visitors. My longest research day was a Monday and I never saw the gallery empty, instead it seemed to be constantly bustling with people. I spoke with several security personal and guides who worked consistently in the space. They claimed that the packed setting I was seeing was very common and it was particularly popular with Chicago residents. Many of the visitors and residents I spoke to reminisced about reading Marianne Malone's *The Sixty-Eight Rooms*, a YA fantasy book series based on Thorne's collection at the Chicago Art Institute. A book based on the rooms is far from unusual, with dollhouses and miniatures being referenced in much older stories such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Beatrix Potter's *Tale of Two Bad Mice* (FIG. 40).[96] Yet, miniatures have seen an increased direct reference in popular media. Dramas such as *The Miniaturist*, directly referencing a book of the same name featuring Petronella Oortman's cabinet house, to reality design challenges such as *The Great Big Design Challenge*, *Best in Miniature*, and *Tiny Kitchen Challenge*. Through social media platforms like Instagram and Youtube, miniaturists such as; Anonymous, Bridget McCarty Miniatures, and Bentley House Miniatures have seen popularity, allowing for viable income and sponsors as miniature artists (FIG. 41, 42, 43).[97] For much of the growing miniature community, they source the Covid Outbreak and growing up in lower economic classes to their discovery and fascination

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[96] A story that inspired her own collection of miniatures, eventually leading to the purchase of an extravagant dollhouse that is still displayed at her Hill Top residence.

[97] 1. *Bridget McCarty Miniatures*, *Login • Instagram* (Meta, 2022), https://www.instagram.com/p/Cm2P0TfqAwy/?hl=en.

with miniatures. In interviews I conducted with young artists and collectors, most claimed that they find miniatures comforting. That miniatures act as wish fulfillment; while they cannot have that dream kitchen due to living space, the expense of living, etc., their "Mini self" can. In the world of miniatures, pandemics, debt, global warming, and war can be escaped for a time. Alternatively, the emotions behind them can be explored in the safe, controlled environment of the microcosm. In this manner, contemporary miniaturists use their collection and creation to fill lacks just as Thorne and others like her did. Despite these modern miniatures however, there continues to exist a draw to the Thorne Miniature Period rooms. This continued appreciation for the work of Narcissa Thorne shows that her extensive research and fabrication was not in vain. Her Miniature Period Rooms instill fascination, inspiration, and admiration in their viewers and caretakers. The representation of Narcissa Thorne’s legacy, in miniature.

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# APPENDIX

FIGURES AND REFERENCES



FIG. 1 *French Library of the Modern Period, 1930s E27*. Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023 https://www.artic.edu/artworks/43774/e-27-french-library-of-the-modern-period-1930s

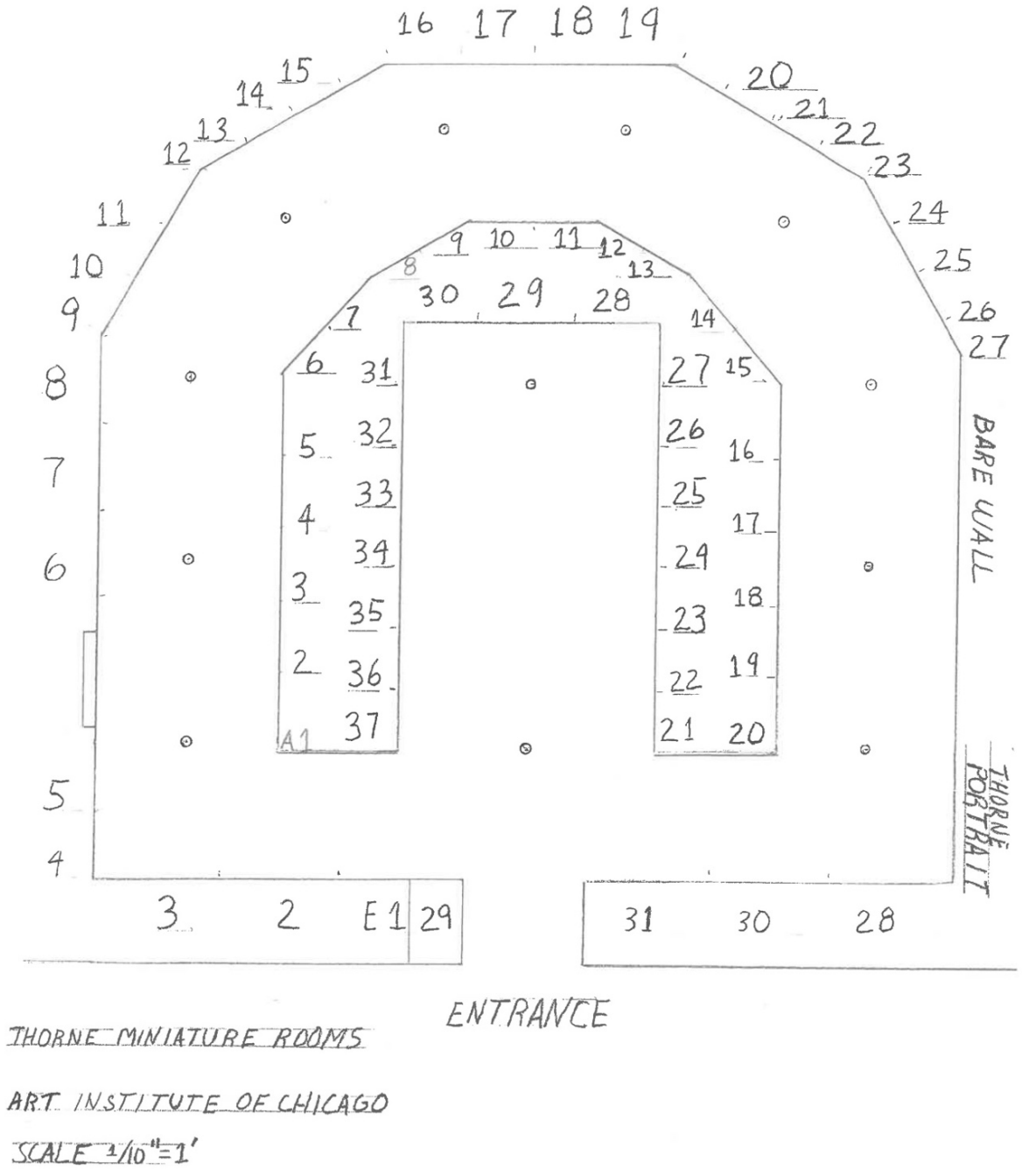



FIG. 2 Murdy, Joel. 2022. *Thorne Miniature Rooms CAI Gallery Schematic*. Hand Implemented on-site by production engineer Joel F. Murdy in 2022.

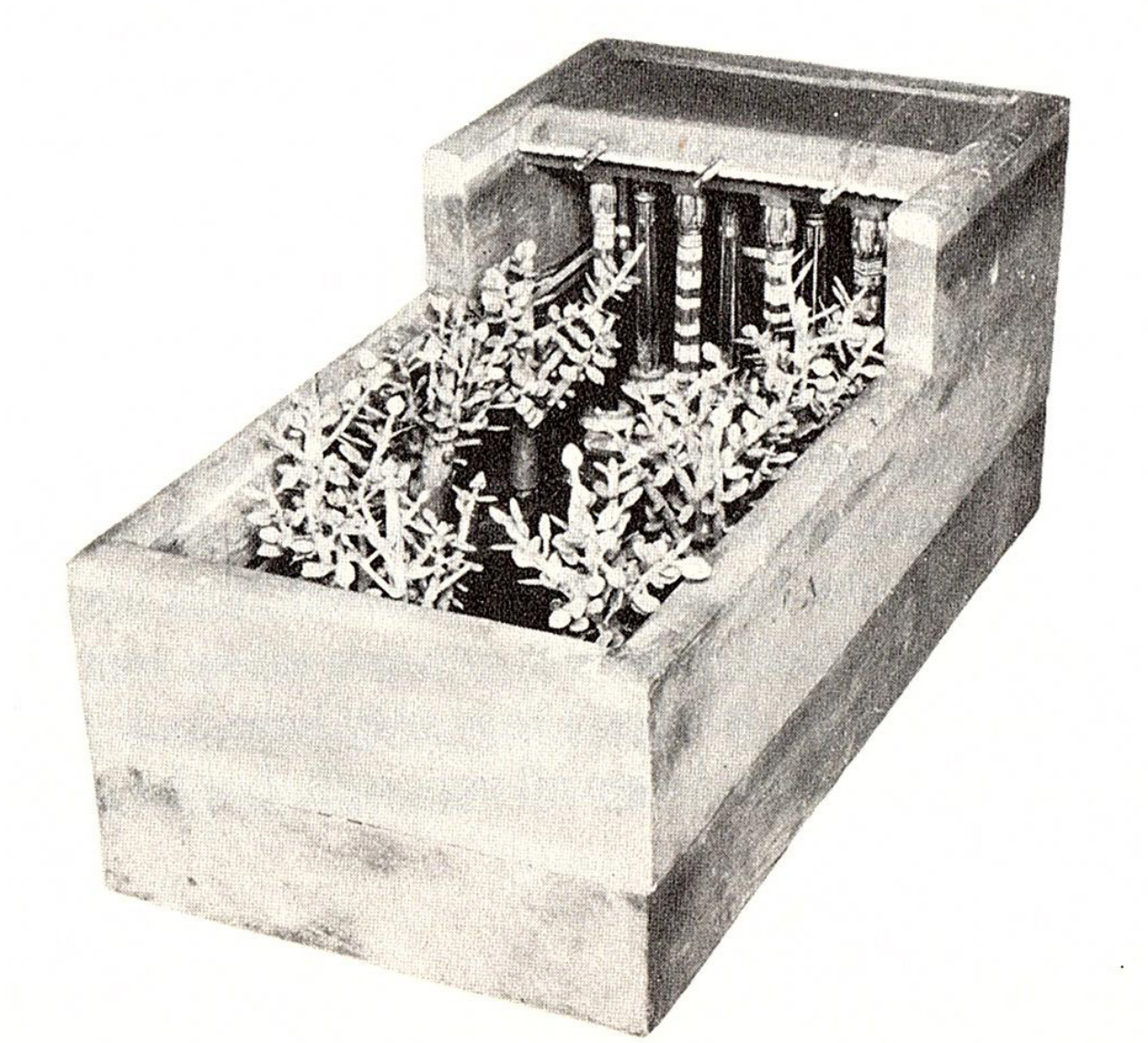


FIG. 3 *Garden of Meket-Rē* Photograph. *A History of Doll Houses*. New York, NY: Charles Scribners's Sons, 1953. Metropolitan Museum of Art



FIG. 4 James, Jaron. *The Stromer House*. Photograph. *Dollhouses from the V&A Museum of Childhood*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015. Germanisches Nationalmuseum.

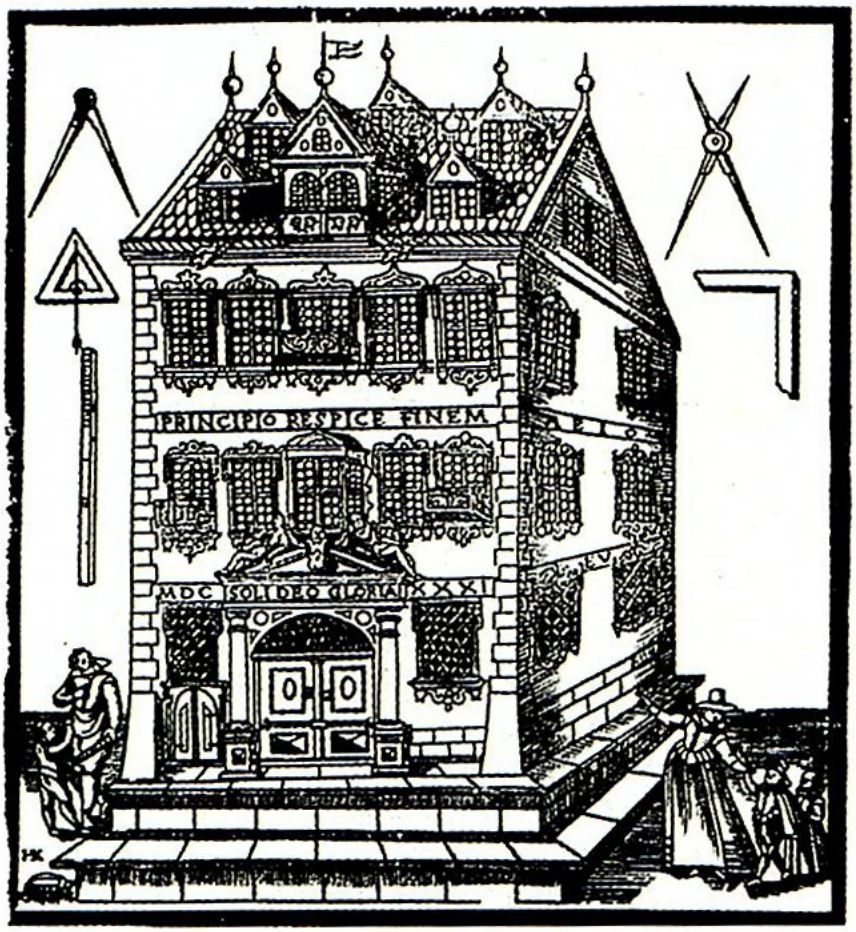



FIG. 5 Wilckens, Von. "Anna Köferlin's House." Woodcut reproduction of broadsheet that accompanied Anna Köferlin's House tour. *Dollhouses from the V&A Museum of Childhood*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015. Victoria and Albert Museum.

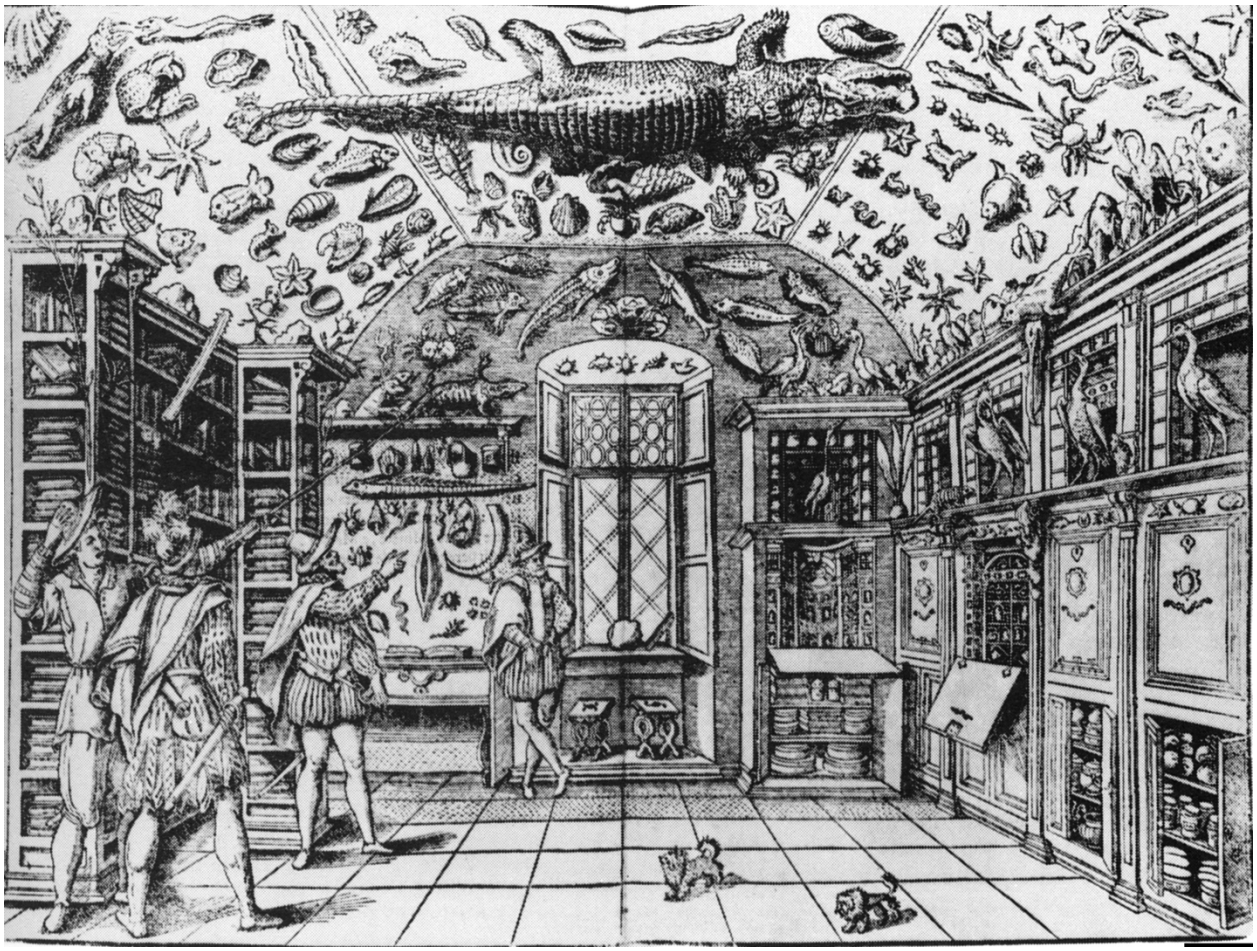


FIG. 6 *Dell'Historia Naturale*. 1599. Engraving. https://jstor.org/stable/community.14395012.



FIG. 7 Svensson, Margareta. *The dolls' house of Petronella Oortman*. Photograph. *The 17th-Century Dolls' Houses of the Rijksmuseum*. Amsterdam: Inmerc BV Wormer, 1994. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

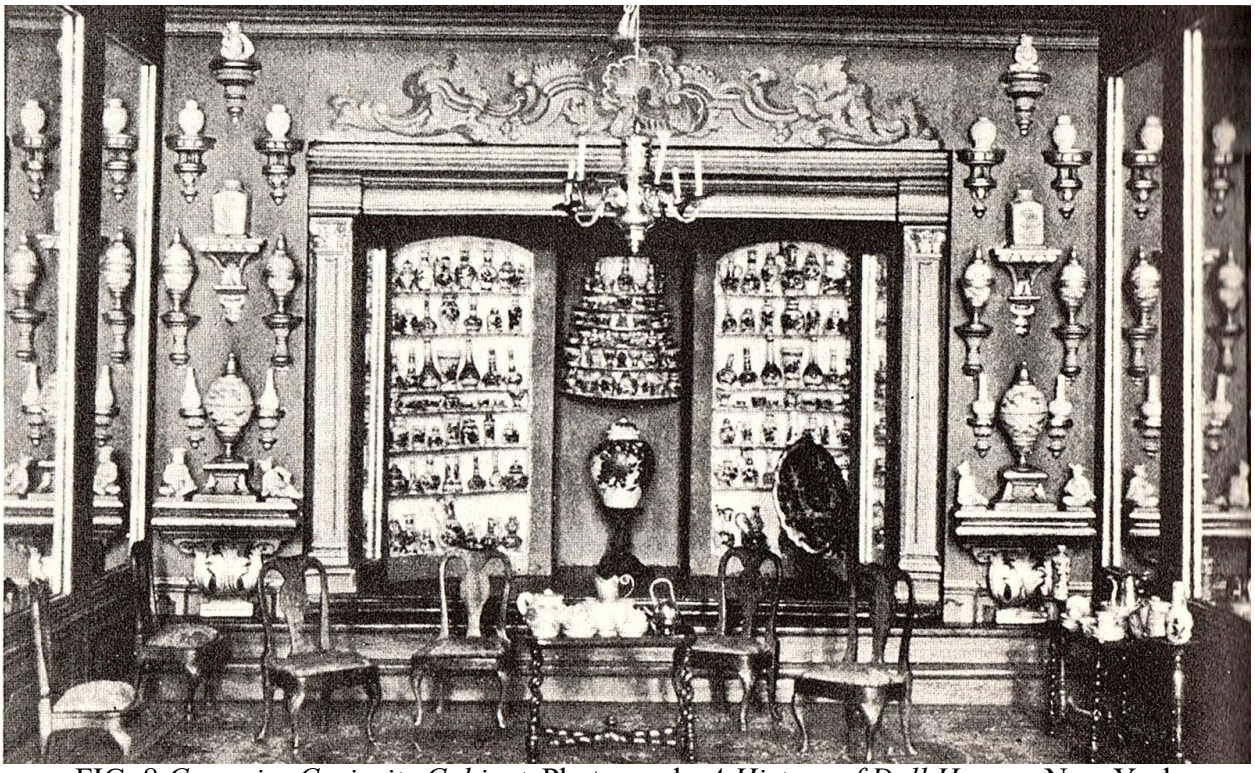


FIG. 8 *Ceramics Curiosity Cabinet*. Photograph. *A History of Doll Houses*. New York, NY: Charles Scribners's Sons, 1953. Hague.

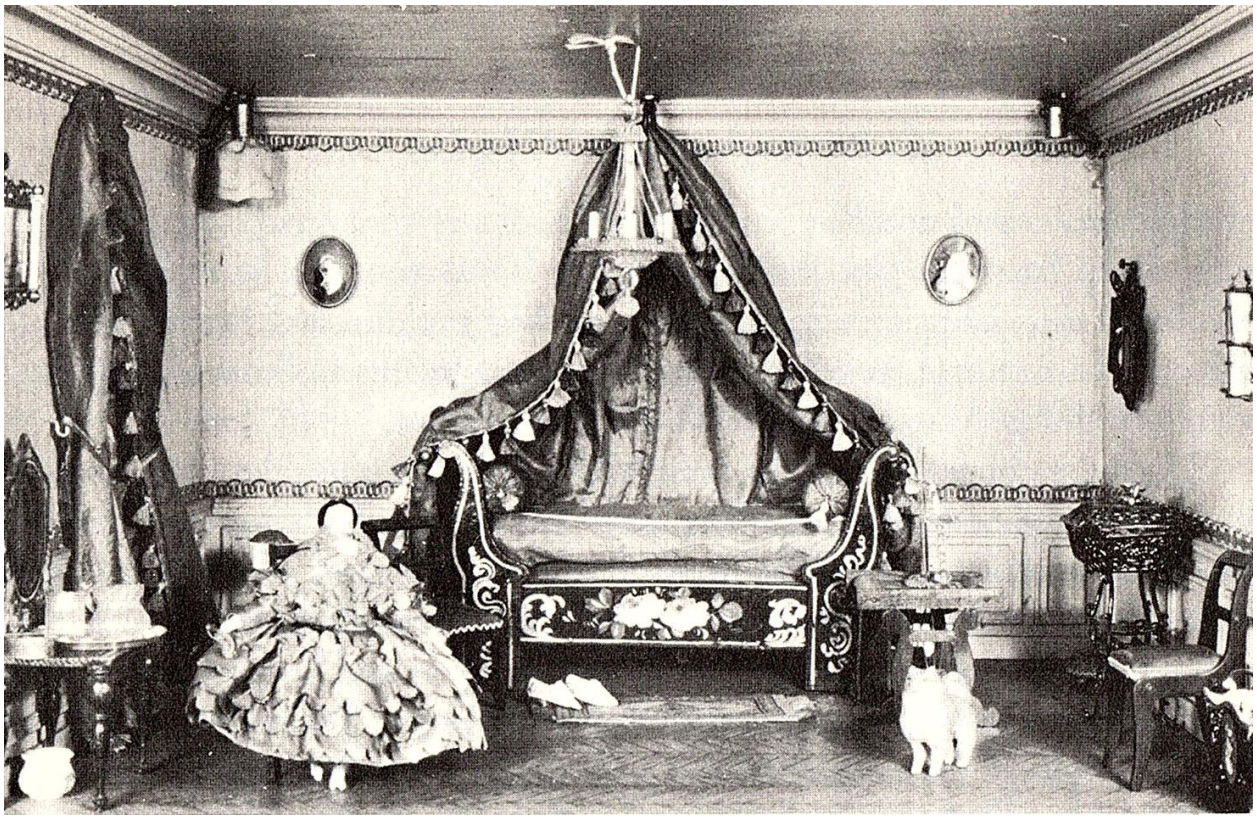


FIG. 9 *Lying In Bedroom*. Photograph. *A History of Doll Houses*. New York, NY: Charles Scribners's Sons, 1953. Musée des Arts Décoratifs.

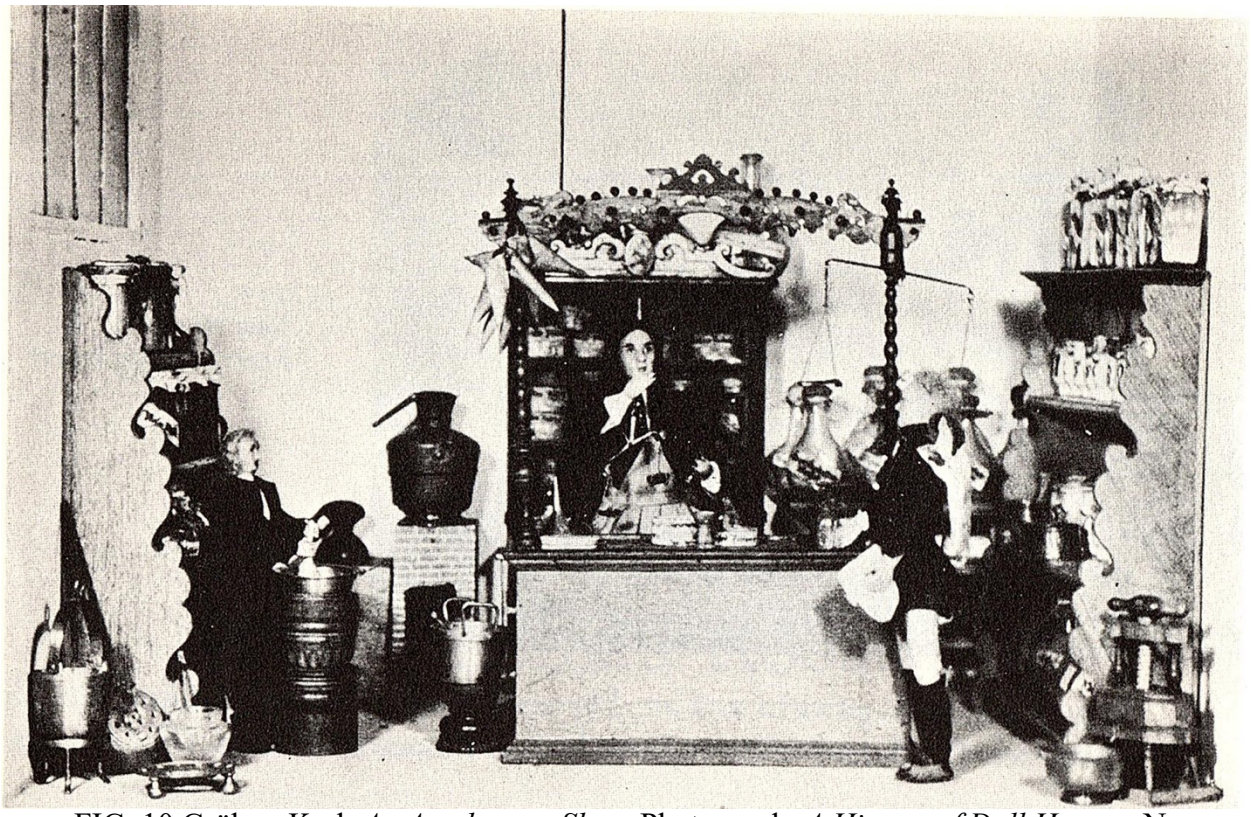


FIG. 10 Gröber, Karl. *An Apothecary Shop*. Photograph. *A History of Doll Houses*. New York, NY: Charles Scribners's Sons, 1953. Das Puppenhaus.



FIG. 11 Fisher, Vories. *Colleen Moore in the courtyard of her castle*. Photograph. *A History of Doll Houses*. New York, NY: Charles Scribners's Sons, 1953. Museum of Science & Industry.



FIG. 12 Botz, Corinne May. *The Pink Bathroom*. Photograph. *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*. New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, Inc, 2004. The Maryland Medical Examiner's Office .

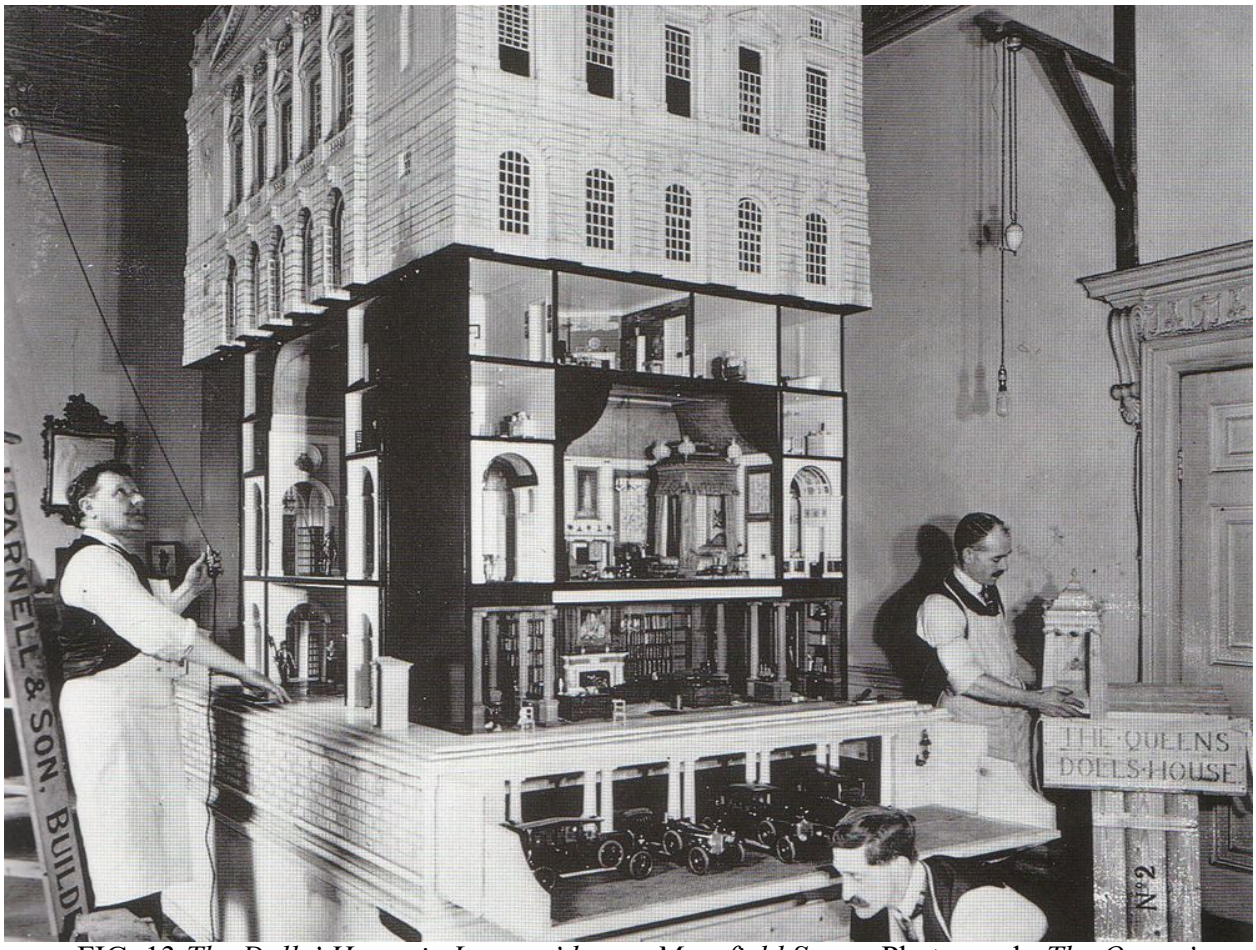



FIG. 13 *The Dolls' House in Lutyens' home, Mansfield Street*. Photograph. *The Queen's Dolls' House*. St. James Palace, London: Royal Collection Enterprises Ltd, 2010.



FIG. 14 *Early Georgian Drawing Room E7*. Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023 https://www.artic.edu/artworks/43704/e-7-english-drawing-room-of-the-early-georgian-period-1730s



FIG. 15 *New England Bedroom A13*. March 14, 2022. Photograph.

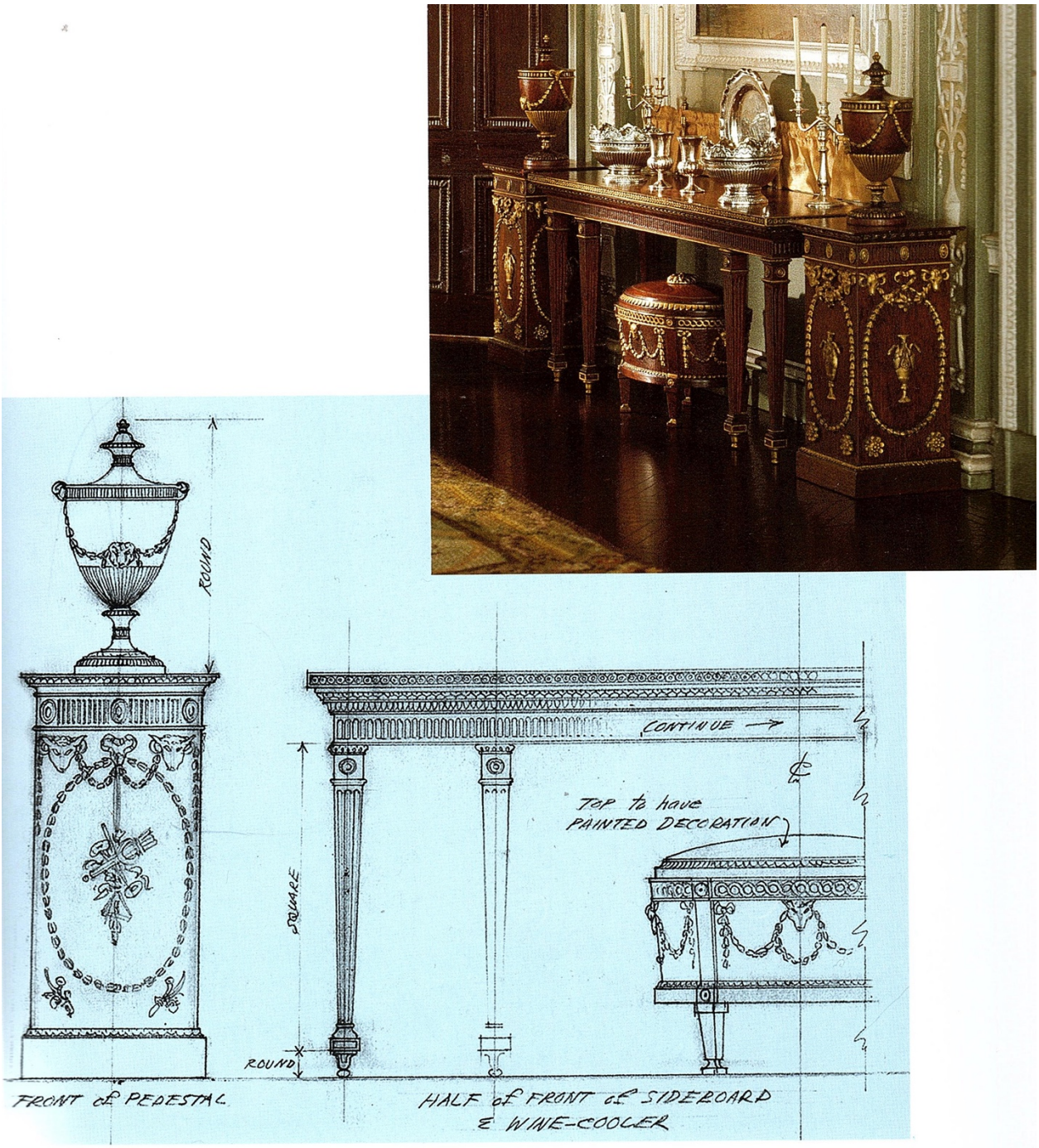



FIG. 16 Culbert-Aguilar, Kathleen, and Micheal Abramson. *English Dining Room of the Georgian Period, 1770-90: Pedestal and Sideboard Sketches.* Photograph. *Miniature Rooms: The Thorne Rooms at the Art Institute of Chicago*. Chicago, IL: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2004. Art Institute of Chicago.



FIG. 17 *E-30: Chinese Interior, Traditional.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023 https://www.artic.edu/artworks/20193/e-30-chinese-interior-traditional



FIG. 18 *E-31: Japanese Traditional Interior.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023 https://www.artic.edu/artworks/20194/e-31-japanese-traditional-interior

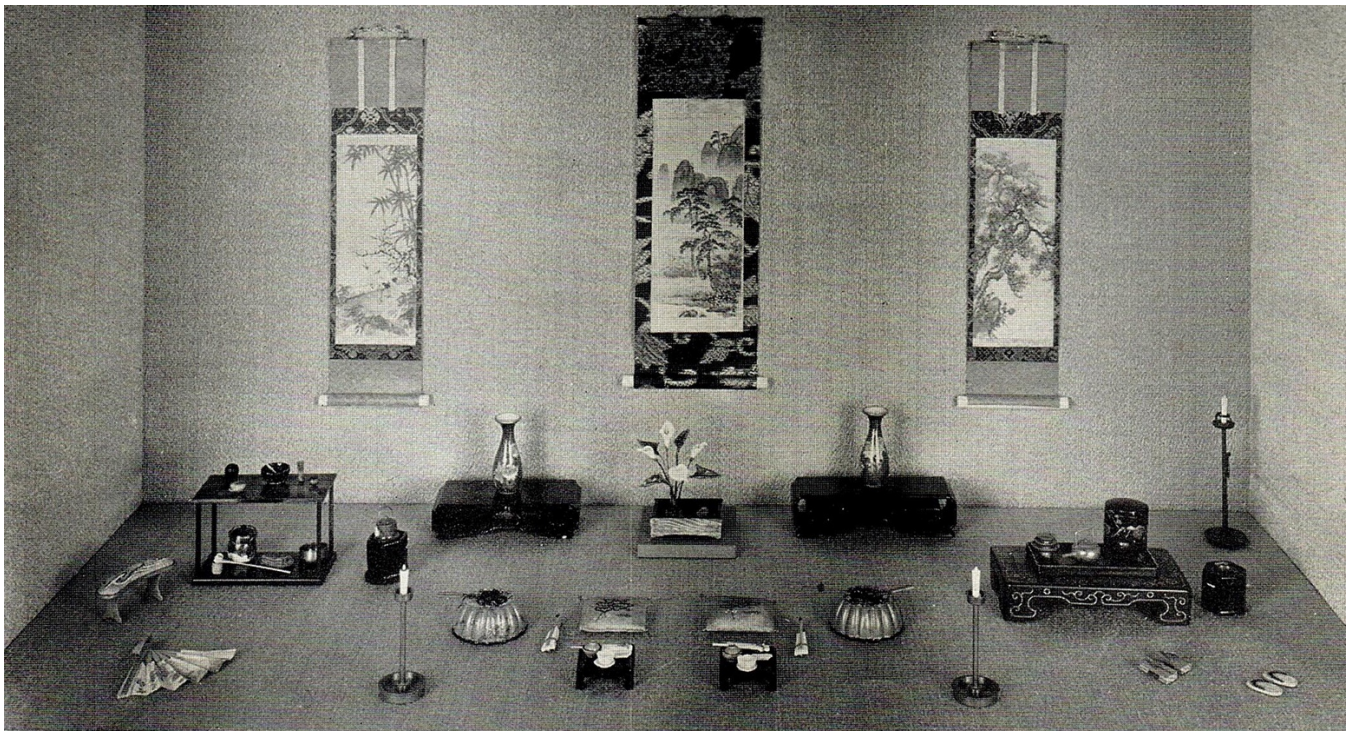


FIG. 19 Thorne, James Ward. *Japanese Vitrine*. Photograph. *Golden Gate Exposition Official Catalog Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne* . San Francisco, CA: Schwabacher-Frey Co and H.S. Crocker Co. Inc., 1940. San Francisco.



FIG. 20 Thorne, James Ward. *Mrs. James Ward Thorne working in her studio*. Photograph. *Miniature Rooms: The Thorne Rooms at the Art Institute of Chicago*. Chicago, IL: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2004. Art Institute of Chicago.



FIG. 21 *A8: Massachusetts Bedroom, c. 1801.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023 https://www.artic.edu/artworks/45336/a8-massachusetts-bedroom-c-1801



FIG. 22 *English Great Hall E1.* March 14, 2022. Photograph.



FIG. 23 *English Drawing Room E15.* Photograph. *Miniature Rooms: The Thorne Rooms at the Art Institute of Chicago*. Chicago, IL: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2004. Art Institute of Chicago.



FIG. 24 *A9: Massachusetts Parlor, 1818.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023 https://www.artic.edu/artworks/45339/a9-massachusetts-parlor-1818



FIG. 25 *A37: California Hallway, c. 1940.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023 https://www.artic.edu/artworks/45418/a37-california-hallway-c-1940



FIG. 26 *Cape Cod Living Room A12*. March 14, 2022. Photograph.



FIG. 27 *E-8: English Bedroom of the Georgian Period, 1760-75.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023 https://www.artic.edu/artworks/43708/e-8-english-bedroom-of-the-georgian-period-1760-75



FIG. 28 *E-14: English Drawing Room of the Victorian Period, 1840-70.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/43729/e-14-english-drawing-room-of-the-victorian-period-1840-70



FIG. 29 *E-25: French Bathroom and Boudoir of the Revolutionary Period, 1793-1804.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/43768/e-25-french-bathroom-and-boudoir-of-the-revolutionary-period-1793-1804



FIG. 30 *E-23: French Dining Room of the Periods of Louis XV and Louis XIV.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/43761/e-23-french-dining-room-of-the-periods-of-louis-xv-and-louis-xiv



FIG. 31 *E-28: German Sitting Room of the Biedermeier Period, 1815-50.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/43778/e-28-german-sitting-room-of-the-biedermeier-period-1815-50



FIG. 32 *Spanish Foyer , 17th Century*. Photograph. *Thorne Miniature Rooms Gallery Guide*. Knoxville, TN: Knoxville Museum of Art, n.d. Knoxville Museum of Art.



FIG. 33 *A18: Shaker Living Room, c. 1800.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/45363/a18-shaker-living-room-c-1800

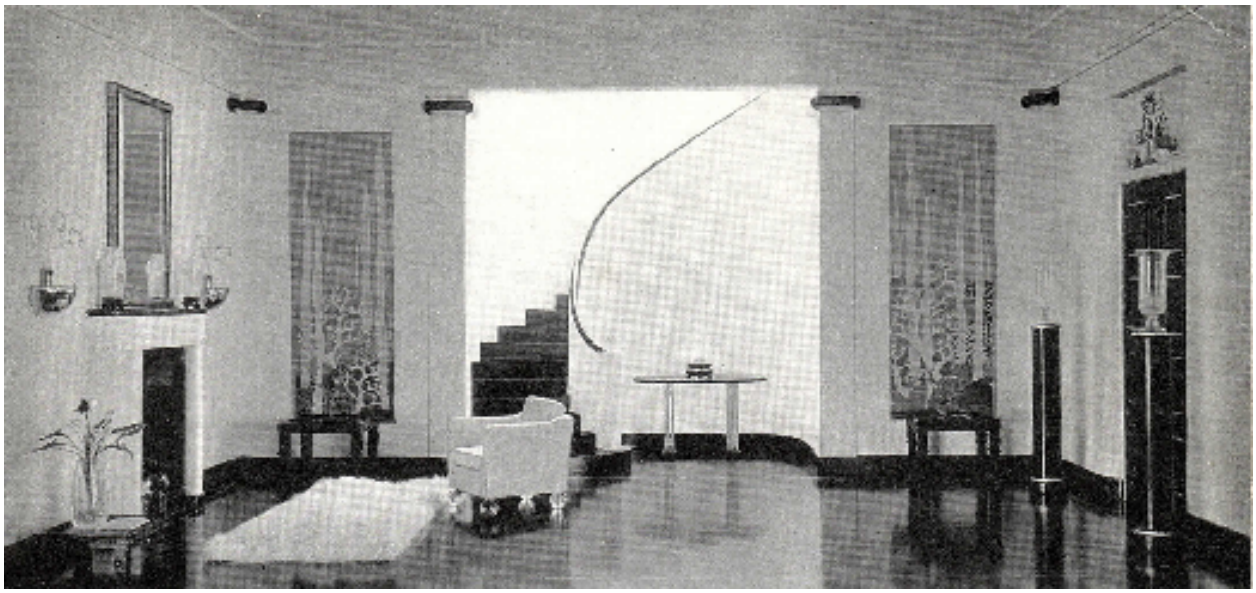


FIG. 34 Thorne, James Ward. *Modern Hall*. Photograph. *Golden Gate Exposition Official Catalog Miniature Rooms by Mrs. James Ward Thorne* . San Francisco, CA: Schwabacher-Frey Co and H.S. Crocker Co. Inc., 1940. San Francisco.



FIG. 35 *A5: Massachusetts Drawing Room, 1768.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/45327/a5-massachusetts-drawing-room-1768



FIG. 36 *E-24: French Salon of the Louis XVI Period, c. 1780.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/43764/e-24-french-salon-of-the-louis-xvi-period-c-1780



FIG. 37 *A15: New York Parlor, 1850-70.* Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/45356/a15-new-york-parlor-1850-70



FIG. 38 Beinlich, Augustus. *Breton Kitchen (c.1750)*. Photograph. *Miniature Rooms By Mrs. James Ward Thorne at the Phoenix Art Museum* . Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Art Museum, 1972. Phoenix Art Museum.



FIG. 39 *A33: "Middletown" Parlor, 1875-90*. Photograph. *Art Institute Chicago*. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. Chicago Art Institute . Accessed June 25, 2023. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/45407/a33-middletown-parlor-1875-90.



FIG. 40 Potter, Beatrix. “Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca Carrying the Bolster.” Cartoon. *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*. London: Frederick Warne & Co. , 1904.

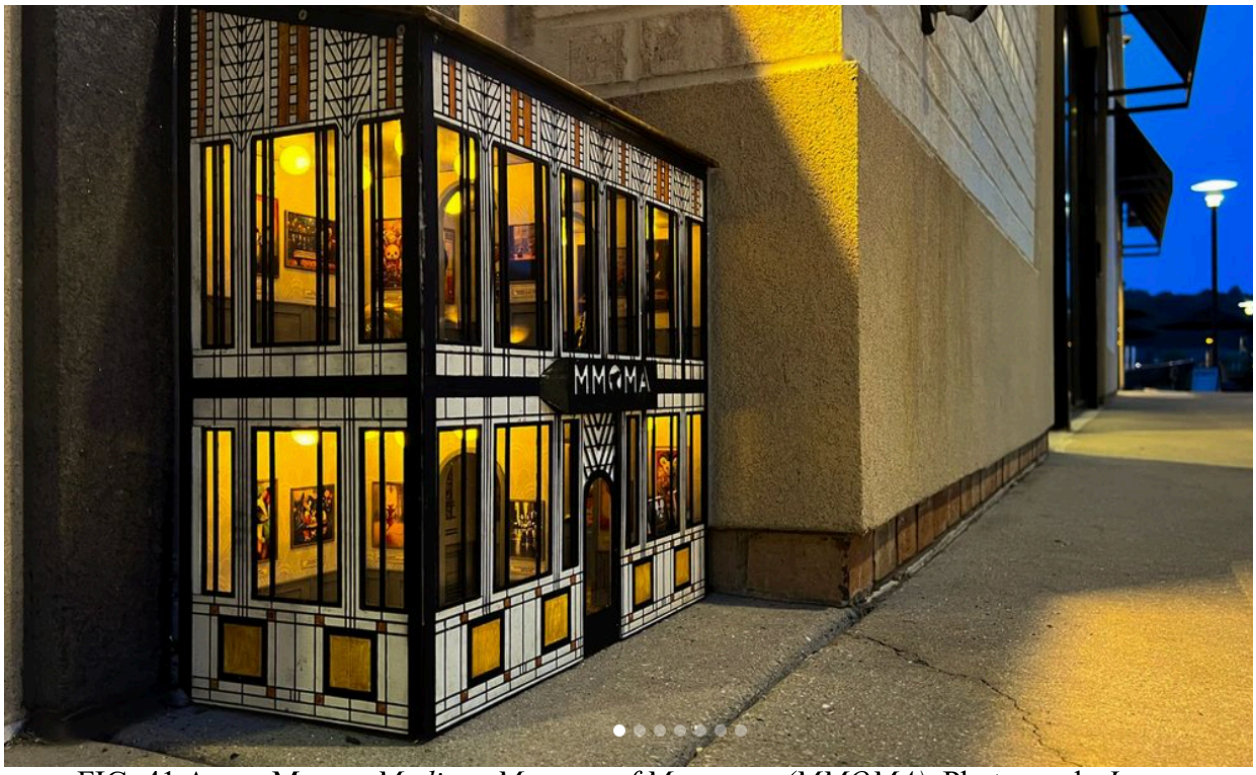



FIG. 41 AnonyMouse. *Madison Museum of Mouse art (MMOMA)*. Photograph. *Instagram*. Madison, Wisconsin: Meta, June 7, 2023. Madison, Wisconsin. https://www.instagram.com/anonymouse_mmx/?hl=en.




FIG. 42 McCarty, Bridget. *Central Perk Miniature Roombox*. Photograph. *Instagram*. Meta, May 10, 2022. https://www.instagram.com/p/CdYrvNgLliG/?hl=en.




FIG. 43 Bentley, Ara. *Beetlejuice Purgatory Waiting Room*. Photograph. *Instagram*. Meta, May 12, 2022. https://www.instagram.com/p/CdeP2lEpssa/?hl=en.