

Minis Magnified

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YU YUAN

Artist: Madelyn Cook

Location: Exploring the World Gallery



February ushers in the Chinese New Year, considered the most important of Chinese festivals. The year 2011 is Xin Mao, the Year of the Rabbit, a very lucky animal whose symbolic year is supposed to bring tranquility and peace. Those born in the Year of the Rabbit are said to be wise, kind and gentle. We at The Mini-Time Machine Museum are eager to see where this year will take us!

In honor of Chinese New Year, we would like to pay tribute to another of our recent acquisitions from renowned miniature artisan Madelyn Cook. The piece, Yu Yuan, which translates to "Garden of Ease," is a stunning replica of the classical Dragon Pavilion found in the Yuyuan Garden, located in Anren Jie, Shanghai. The garden, which was created more than 400 years ago by a Ming Dynasty officer named Pan Yunduan¹, occupies an area of about five acres in the heart of the old city. The garden has seen many transformations, due to war and changes in government. "The Yuyuan Garden you see today is the result of a five year restoration project which began in 1956. The garden was open to the public in September, 1961."² These days, the garden is a popular tourist attraction, especially during the Lantern Festival.

When first laying eyes on Cook's miniature Yu Yuan, you are immediately pulled into a sense of serenity, taking in all of the minute details: the bell hanging at the pavilion entrance, the soft mossy leaves falling on the roof and over the surface of the water, and the rocks and cobblestone guiding

visitors along their private reveries. Inside, you discover a miniature calligraphy brush, a silver pipe and gong, and a silk kimono with matching black slippers. In all directions you see Cook's impressive lattice work, recreating the maze-like designs commonly found in the Ming Dynasty. If you could turn your head to just the right angle, you would see the detail of the ceiling beams, which Cook laboriously drew to scale by hand using her personal photographs and reference books. Each miniature artifact is a work of art deserving of its own display, from the cupboard made of walnut and carpathian elm, to the chairs with their micro petite point cushions. Even the rugs were stitched by hand made from ancient patterns recreated by Cook herself.

The garden is a testament to classical Chinese architecture, fraught with symbolism. It is "...a place for contemplation and harmony with nature. Doorways take the varied forms of a moon, a gourd, a flower or a vase. Windows are shaped like flower petals, fans or bells."³ Cook took great pains to recreate the majesty of Yuyuan, only making slight variations when adapting the design for miniature scale. In her journal, Cook writes,



The Dragon Pavilion copies the basic attributes of Yu Yuan, but the roof more closely resembles the Imperial City in Peking, including the imperial yellow color. The surrounding dragon walls normally would be up to 20 feet high (they are lower here for viewing purposes.) The dragon heads of the walls meet over a circular opening of a moon gate, symbol of both heaven and perfection.⁴

With no detail left unexamined, Cook's work could itself be called a symbol of perfection. Yu Yuan will make its debut

on February 22nd in our Exploring the World Gallery. Come and see what Madelyn Cook describes as “a work of learning, frustration and love.”⁵ A true feast for the eyes and the spirit!



1. The garden was finished in 1577, by Pan Yunduan (1368-1644).
2. Architectural Digest. September, 1980. “Gardens: Labyrinths of Yu Yuan In Shanghai’s Old Town” by Elaine B. Steiner. p.162
3. Ibid.
4. The Journals of Madelyn Cook, property of The Mini-Time Machine Museum of Miniatures.
5. Ibid.