

A Peephole Perspective on Tiny Worlds



Lori Nix/ClampArt Gallery

Lori Nix at work on a diorama for a photograph called "Beauty Shop" (2010). [More Photos »](#)

By CAROL KINO
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TWO years ago David Revere McFadden, chief curator of the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, found himself thinking a lot about dioramas. He was installing a show that included work by Thomas Demand, known for slightly creepy photographs of rooms that look realistic but are actually fabricated with colored paper. "How reality is defined is one of those questions that has plagued human beings since the beginning of culture," Mr. McFadden said. "I suddenly thought maybe there are other artists out there working in the same vein but on a smaller scale."

The results are now on view at the museum in ["Otherworldly: Optical Delusions and Small Realities."](#) through Sept. 18.

As soon as Mr. McFadden began hunting for tiny worlds, he found himself confronted with "a hornet's nest of possibilities," he said. Overwhelmed by the sheer abundance of dollhouse makers, miniature train

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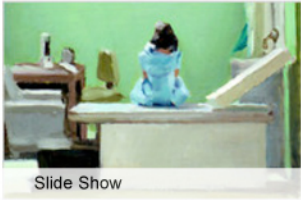
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enthusiasts, theatrical maquette designers and the like, he focused on artists who create dioramas as stand-alone sculptural environments or use them as the subject of photographs and videos.



Slide Show
'Otherworldly'

The 37 artists he chose include well-known ones like the photographer James Casebere and the installation artist Michael C. McMillen, as well as new talents he unearthed using Google and Facebook. Some made work especially for the show, including David Opdyke, who installed a disaster-movie scene in the lobby that depicts Columbus Circle, which the museum faces, upside down and in ruins.

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The work varies greatly in mood, from Jonah Samson's lurid crime and peep-show scenes to the tiny realms of dandelions and grass that Patrick Jacobs appears to have trapped under glass. There is also a tremendous range of scale: Amy Bennett's two-inch-high [medical clinic diorama](#) has been a model for her even smaller paintings,

while Kim Keever photographs his Hudson River-like [landscapes](#) underwater in a 200-gallon tank.

Although Mr. McFadden found it surprising that most of the artists building tiny worlds were men, he didn't find it odd that most work in New York. (As he put it: "What's the biggest problem an artist here faces? Space.") But the "real eye opener," he noted, was that in an age when digital technology reigns supreme, these artists gravitate to the handmade and low tech, adding, "It is a wonderful return to the basis of making things."

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