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How does the act of miniaturising elements of 19th Century Japanese culture create power dynamics in a museum display.

McMahon, Georgina

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Research Question:

How does the act of miniaturising elements of 19th Century Japanese culture create power dynamics in a museum display.

MA student: Georgina McMahon

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First reader: Prof. Anne Gerritsen

Second readers: Dr. Arthur Crucq

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Abstract

I became interested in miniature models while working for an amateur theatre group near my home in Dublin, Ireland. As a set designer, it was my job to study the production, discuss the set requirements with the director and to create the set on stage. Part of this process involved constructing a miniature model of the stage from card with the finished set-piece on top. It occurred to me that the models I made, which seemingly served only one function – to visually inform the viewer of the set’s appearance – also served to fascinate for other reasons. Crafting the model involved a level of skill which redirected focus off the subject of the play; being aesthetically pleasing in itself, the model served as an artwork in its own right; and also it evoked a natural fascination with *scale*, lending a playfulness to the finished piece.

I later noticed how miniature models are being used in the museum space; an environment comparable to the theatre in terms of being an audience-focused cultural institution that’s involved in telling human stories. The Ethnographic Museum in Leiden, Museum Volkenkunde, aims to tell the story of different cultures through its many diverse displays. Among these, the Japanese collection stood out for its use of miniatures belonging to a period in history where Japan enjoyed exclusive trade with the Netherlands. For this reason, I selected my four case studies from this exhibition space and time period and set out to explore how the miniaturization of 19th Century Japanese culture can create power dynamics within a museum display.

Introduction

Consideration of the miniature model, its place in the museum and the concept of “capturing” a culture

“Miniatures evoke a feeling of wonder or awe. ... They suspend reality, taking you out of your surroundings and bringing you into a new world.”

- Joe Fig¹

Choosing the miniature model as a subject for research requires an understanding of their diversity and prevalence in everyday life. The construction of miniatures is both an ancient and global practice, with examples to be found across a diverse range of cultures dating back to some of the earliest instances of human artistic craft². Since “miniature” can be used to loosely describe any small object which resembles a larger form it is unsurprising that there are many different kinds of miniature to be found, not only differing in function but also in accuracy of replication. Most individuals are first introduced to miniature models in some shape or form in their early childhood. It is through the act of play that children begin to engage with the world around them and to prepare themselves for adult life, which is why so many toys resemble miniaturised replicas of people, buildings, vehicles and almost anything else that can be thought of, with an appearance that can range anywhere from realistic to outright fantastical. These kinds of toy are perhaps the most prevalent form of miniature model in everyday life and often continue to wield a certain power of nostalgia over the adult viewer. Undeniably,

¹ APEXART website, *Feel Big Live Small*, Accessed 16 April 2022, <https://apexart.org/images/smithee/smithee.pdf>

² Davy, and Dixon, *Worlds in Miniature: Contemplating Miniaturisation in Global Material Culture*, 1.

dollhouses must be considered among the best examples of miniature model toys with an enduring allure that not only spans hundreds of years but also permeates all age groups. The hobby of furnishing dollhouses became popular for wealthy households in Europe during the 19th Century. With time, the creation and collection of miniatures became commonplace and widespread, with dollhouses eventually becoming a typical toy for the average child.³ Fortunately, a number of impressive early dollhouses survived to the present day and can be found preserved and displayed in certain museum exhibitions. Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum houses one of the finest examples, the dollhouse of Petronella Oortman dating from c. 1686 – c. 1710.⁴ Created with accurate proportions and from costly materials such as tortoiseshell and pewter, this miniature gives a clear impression of the owner's social status, wealth and lifestyle. With consideration of the fact that dollhouses remain a popular toy today, the inclusion of such a miniature in a museum display creates a sense of generational continuity and personal connection for the observer while the sheer scale and attention to detail inspires awe.

As miniature models have the ability to capture the aesthetic of a larger structure, they are often seen in the form of souvenirs created for visiting tourists. Such objects carry allure for their play on scale, their role in memory and experience consolidation and in their attempt to "capture" a culture. When considering scale, everything is relative. For this reason, determining whether a structure is large or small is chiefly a process of comparison. The fascination evoked by a dramatic difference in scale, to oneself or to a known structure, is further enhanced when the object in question bears an accurate resemblance to the prototype. The wider the spectrum of scale distortion the more powerful the effect is on the viewer. An example used by Davy and Dixon is that of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Being an immediately recognisable and

³ APEXART Collection website, Accessed 16 April 2022, <https://apexart.org/exhibitions/smithee.php>

⁴ Rijksmuseum website, Accessed 16 April 2022, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/BK-NM-1010>

monumental structure, it has served as a famous tourist attraction since its erection and, as a result, is the inspiration behind the popular miniature Eiffel Tower souvenirs. The tiny models are rendered fascinating by the comparative scale difference to the original structure. While the scale difference is intriguing in itself, part of the motivation behind the purchase of such souvenir miniatures is the attempt to capture and immortalise an individual's experience of a place and culture. Susan Stewart argues that experiencing an object lies outside of the body. The distortion of experience and the need to recollect and authenticate this experience is somewhat satisfied by obtaining such a souvenir. The difference in scale provides a measurement for the normal, and exaggerates the monumentality of the original structure.⁵

Museums can be seen to employ different types of miniature models for a wide range of purposes. Categorizing miniature models into different "types" alludes to the difference in their primary intended function. It is this function and its original intended audience that informs the aesthetic of the finished piece. For example, a miniature model intended to be used as a toy by children is more likely to be unrealistically colourful and poorly proportioned when compared to the life-sized original. Contrary to this, an architectural scale model has a more practical function as it is intended to convey accurate information about a structure, and is therefore made to scale and often with a minimal use of colour so as to draw attention to the form itself. Alternatively, a miniature created as an artwork is not intended as a plaything, nor does it have a practical application. It is rather a form of creative expression and intended to be intellectually stimulating and aesthetically pleasing for an interested observer.

While the original intended function shapes the viewer's perception and understanding of the model, the model's display in an exhibition space creates new meaning and added functions. If the original intention of a historic dollhouse is for play, then the function of this dollhouse in a contemporary exhibition is for the viewer to *reflect* on play, and how this looked at a specific time in history and with consideration of the real individuals who owned the

⁵ Stewart, *On Longing : Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 134

dollhouse. In the context of the museum, the new function of the dollhouse is to tell a human story that is rooted in history, and to preserve this story in its display, such is the case with the Oortman dollhouse. With this in mind, if the original intended function of a historic miniature is decided by the original owner, then the life and history of this individual becomes vitally important for the modern day viewer's understanding of the object.

The viewer's interpretation and understanding of the historic miniature in the museum space is heavily influenced by the object's history and original intended function. When a museum houses a historic miniature, such as the Rijksmuseum's dollhouse of Petronella Oortman, the viewer naturally takes the object's unique background and time period into consideration. For this reason, miniatures of the same category, such as "dollhouse", may vary quite noticeably in terms of function and significance. The Stettheimer dollhouse, which is currently on display in the Museum of the City of New York, contrasts greatly to the Oortman dollhouse due to differing histories and original functions. Owned by the artistic and theatrical Stettheimer sisters during the early 20th Century, its creation is connected to creativity and inspiration rather than a conscious display of wealth and status. Annabel Wharton argues that this miniature enhanced their natural flare for the arts and, in stating this, that models generally have their own powerful agency.⁶ This particular dollhouse was created by and for adults and intended to reflect the environment of its creator Carrie Stettheimer with an eclectic interior ranging in styles from Chinese, French empire, modern, Baroque and Gothic.⁷ While the scaling was inaccurate, the rooms were in fact modelled off of the real living spaces occupied by Stettheimer and created sensory stimulus through the use of colours, patterns and textures, to create an exaggerated model living space. In contrast with the dollhouse of Petronella Oortman, the Stettheimer dollhouse worked to warp the reality of a real space rather than merely replicating, with exactness, the dimensions and style of that space. Adding to this warp on reality is the inclusion

⁶ Wharton, Annabel. "Doll's House/Dollhouse: Models and Agency." 53, no. 1 (2019): 28-56.

⁷ Ibid, 30.

of miniature artworks adorning its interior walls. One such artwork painted by Duchamp, a French tutor to the Stettheimer sisters, references the artist's full-scale work titled "The Nude Descending the Stairs". The subject matter clearly indicates the owners' intention for an exclusively mature audience as well as their interest in the art and artists of their time.

It can be seen from these examples of museum-displayed dollhouses that the role of the miniature within the museum space remains intertwined with its original owner, audience and function. Even when the miniatures in question are both dollhouses, they are received differently from a contemporary audience due to the differing nature of their original functions, owners and time in history. While one dollhouse displayed status and wealth in the 17th Century, the other behaved as a 19th Century inspiration-piece for its owners through its use as an ongoing artistic project. Alongside inspiration, the elements of play, imagination and story telling are present, as they are in children's dollhouses, but with an overriding emphasis on intellectual and artistic experimentation. The change of context within the museum setting emphasises the historical figures associated with the objects and their place in history and in the history of craft.

One of the reasons why miniatures are employed so often in museum displays is that they have the power to visually convey a great deal of information. They are also compact by nature, and are therefore extremely space-efficient in a display where room is limited. Aside from the practical benefits within a museum setting, these are undeniably multi-faceted objects equipped with an innate ability to attract a range of viewers for a multitude of reasons. The relationship between the miniature's ability to convey information, its display of skilled craftsmanship and artistry as well as the ever-present element of play allows for such objects to attract a wide audience including children and adults alike. Add to these existing elements a historical significance and the miniature model becomes a truly fascinating artifact.

While the original function of the miniature plays an important role in understanding and appreciating the object in a contemporary museum display,

the museum's role can be seen to further influence the observer's interpretation of the object. While the original owners of the items have power over the aesthetic and function, as seen with the dollhouses, the collectors and curators in the museum space have power over the narrative that is created through the object's display. Leiden's Ethnographic Museum, Museum Volkenkunde, is devoted to the depiction of culture with the use of individual objects each telling a human story. According to the museum's mission statement, the common human themes expressed across different cultures give a sense of global unity despite perceived differences.⁸ Applying this modern agenda to an object that is taken out of context, with a differing original function and belonging to a specific period in history creates a complex and layered experience for the viewer. One particular cultural exhibition where this can be observed is the Volkenkunde's Japanese display. Several of the miniature models displayed in this exhibition space date from the early to mid 19th Century and are each attributed to different Dutch officials involved in creating Japanese collections according to their own taste and interests. These artifacts were either sourced or commissioned towards the end of more than 200 years of trade exclusivity between Japan and the Netherlands, lending a uniquely Dutch perspective to the Western interpretation of Japanese culture at this time. Being remote and closed to the world, Japan of the 1800s held much mystery and intrigue for the few officials granted access during this time giving them a unique power of representation according to their personal interpretation of this foreign land and its people.

Considering how miniature models can be closely associated with childhood through their application as toys and their implicit playfulness due to altered scale, the use of this medium to convey culture in a museum setting can be interpreted as somewhat infantilizing. The act of reducing scale can be likened to an overall simplification of the subject matter itself, therefore creating a power imbalance between collector and subject. Likewise, the act of commissioning such a model to effectively convey "otherness" shows an attempt to comprehensively harness the culture and lifestyle of another. In the case of the

⁸ Volkenkunde Museum website, Accessed 16 April 2022, <https://www.volkenkunde.nl/nl/onze-collectie>

Oortman dollhouse, the owner is seen to replicate her own home in detail, alluding to a certain mastery over the world she inhabits. Similarly during play, children control the miniature world by creating characters and narratives lending them a “godlike” status within the realm of their miniature world. The Stettheimer dollhouse behaves more as a piece of artwork, revealing the owners’ power of self-expression and self-representation. The power, therefore, lies with the creator and user of the miniature model. In other words, the subject matter of the model facilitates the needs and intentions of the one who collects or uses it. In a similar way, the practice of collecting souvenirs when visiting a new part of the globe can be seen as an attempt to consolidate an individual’s memories or experience of that location. The experience is inherently a first hand one, and so, the souvenir can be seen to hold personal value and significance predominantly for the individual who collects it. It is less about the place and more about the individual’s experience of visiting that place. The miniature souvenir mirrors the dollhouse in its power relationship between collector and subject.

Knowing that museum curators can use the space to create narratives regarding the subject matter of its exhibition, the original intention of those responsible for collecting should not be over looked. The Volkenkunde Museum’s Japanese exhibition space displays objects that were not only collected by the museum but were originally collected by Dutch officials with the intention of displaying them in a museum. The accepted authority of the museum institution for conveying accurate information to the public coupled with this showcase of the historical propensity of the Dutch to collect cultural artefacts also creates a power play within the museum between the collector and the subject matter.

This thesis aims to explore the implicit power dynamics relating to the cultural representation of Japan through four 19th Century Japanese miniature models in the Volkenkunde Museum’s Japanese collection. The miniature model case studies have been chosen to reflect different aspects of Japanese culture from this time period and include the domestic space as explored through the kitchen case study (1800-1823) attributed to Jan Cock Blomhoff, industry as explored through the gold or silver mine case study (1800-1829) attributed to Johannes Frederik van Overmeer Fisscher, and belief systems as explored

through the two miniature shrine case studies (1800-1829 and 1850-1877 respectively) attributed to Philipp Franz von Siebold. The question of power dynamics will be explored in relation to the act of choosing the miniature model for cultural representation, the 19th Century background of these miniatures, the collectors' and curators' influence over the choice of artefacts for display and the observer's power of interpretation over the objects. The function, or role, of these miniatures in a contemporary museum display will also be examined with regards to their original intended function.

In order to investigate this topic, the unique relationship between Japan and the Netherlands from 1639-1854 will first be considered to establish some of the initial power relationships between the collectors and the Japanese natives with whom they interacted on their travels. As one of the most prolific collectors of Japanese artefacts for the Netherlands at the time, and due to his connection to the shrine case studies, the life and work of Siebold will be the focus of this discussion. Works such as *The Remarkable P. F. B. Von Siebold: His Life In Europe and Japan* by Compton and Thijsse will be used to provide important background to this culture of collecting. This will also provide context and illuminate the significance of this collection, particularly the fact that these objects represent a uniquely Dutch perspective and insight into Japan during this timeframe. Following this will be an examination of the role of the Ethnographic Museum and how museums create narratives and shape knowledge through their displays with particular focus on the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden, the Netherlands. Works including Moser's *The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge* and Hooper Greenhill's *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* will be used to support this.

Understanding how miniatures are utilised within the museum requires an understanding of how museums use their collections to create narratives. The design of the displays as well as the flow of the space, the lighting and even the architecture all factor into the visitor's perception of the objects and comprehension of the display on the whole. Exploring the museum's ability to construct knowledge and create a narrative informs this study of the miniature's role and power to execute the museum's "mission". The impact of the models'

environment, that is, the type of museum, will also be taken into account to reveal the importance of context on the viewer's interpretation of the model itself. The multi-faceted nature of the miniature invites the viewer to explore the scaled down space, to use their imagination to visualise the space in real life dimensions. The careful and accurate rendering of the pieces and skilled craftsmanship inspire admiration while perhaps unintentionally serving to distract from the subject matter at hand. The objects themselves work to inform and educate but only with respect to a specific individual's personal experience and interests. The original Dutch Officials responsible for these collections are part of the history associated with these miniatures. This thesis will argue that the display of such objects in the 19th Century can be viewed as a display of wealth, power, status and even dominance. The widespread preoccupation with the collection of objects from the distant past also reveals a level of idolisation for artefacts belonging to a different age and ultimately lost to time. Making up part of a large body of objects relating to the Dutch East Indies, they can be seen in various museum displays where the context and museum mission plays a significant role in determining the viewer's perception of the miniature and understanding of their function. They are undeniably practical in a museum space, where they can be used to communicate a wealth of information while remaining extremely space efficient and compact. They themselves can be antiques, objects of historical significance and also aesthetically stimulating and pleasing objects in their own right. Capturing the viewpoint of historical figures and translating this to a modern audience comes with its own pitfalls. Rendering life size details into a small-scale model requires a deft touch and such craftsmanship is most admirable when executed with a high degree of skill. It is the play between these different elements of the miniature that makes these objects so intriguing and valuable to museums but it is also these same elements which reveal implicit power dynamics.

Miniature models are not simply "large-made-small". In this exhibition they are intended to evoke a lifestyle, a culture and a time in history; in other words, they are a visual reflection on certain aspects of society and humanity at large. However, as this thesis will explore, the act of reducing scale results in an over-

simplification of subject matter while the practice of collecting from overseas reveals a desire to consolidate information into an indisputable whole, indicating a certain authority over its subject matter.

Chapter 1

Examining the unique relationship between Japan and the Netherlands from 1639-1854

The objects accumulated in Japan by the Dutch East India Company were as diverse as they were numerous, and intended to convey every aspect of Japan for a European audience which, in many respects, was very much “in the dark” when it came to this culture and people during the 19th Century. Only a privileged few could travel to Dejima and, even then, they were highly restricted as to where they were permitted to travel and what items they could collect along the way. These restrictions undoubtedly added to the intrigue of these foreign objects. The mystery and secrecy of the land, the challenges of collecting and the distance by ship which these objects were transported were all veritable “hooks” to entice a diverse audience back home, where the items also signify the achievement of the Dutch people in their trade connections and, for this reason, also evoke a sense of national pride.

Among these many objects collected and transported are a number of intriguing miniatures. The objects came to signify “otherness”, giving a sense of a distant country and inspiring awe through their unfamiliarity. The four case studies that will be discussed in later chapters are examples of such miniatures, where the representation of different aspects of Japanese culture inform the viewer’s understanding of the object. The case studies, which make up part of the same exhibition, have been selected for their complexity and layered meaning, but also as they are associated with three different collectors of Japanese items during this period of trade. It is not only a collection of artefacts but a collection of collectors.

To fully understand the miniatures in question, it is first important to consider their origin, the collectors’ intentions and backgrounds as well as the social and political climate in which they were sourced. All of these elements are responsible for their display today and factor into their layered meaning.

The unique connection between the Netherlands and Japan at this time is not to be underestimated. Due to the shogun's mistrust and fear of Catholicism infiltrating Japan, trade was eventually severed with all western countries except the Netherlands. This exclusivity strengthened the bond between these two nations, enhanced further by the fact that the Protestant Dutch continued to take part in the e-fumi ceremony and to show their disapproval of Catholic-style Christianity. This all had the effect of proving Dutch loyalty to the shogun and ensuring continued trade with Japan.⁹ Despite this privilege, foreign traders could not travel into Japan and likewise, Japanese natives were not permitted to leave their homeland.¹⁰ Items traded were often quite different from those collected privately. The Dutch brought medicine, clocks, scientific instruments, spices, sugar and wood while Japan provided valuable metals such as gold, silver and copper along with rice, tea and lacquer ware. The artificial island of Dejima constructed off the Nagasaki harbour was made the post for any visitors to Japan, aside from this items could only be collected during the annual court journeys. During this time, the Emperor resided in the Imperial Palace in Kyoto and the court visit involved visiting the shogun, or military ruler, in Edo, in order to pay homage, display respect and give assurance of continued loyalty. After 1790, this journey became less frequent, happening only once every four years. Much like China, Japan has a history of remaining largely isolated from the west which has the effect of adding a certain mystique to the goods traded as well as giving significance to the unique connection with the Dutch.¹¹ The power relationship between the two nations is evident, with each vying for control in some form. The creation of an island appears to serve as a means of separation of Dutch visitors and mainland Japan which perhaps reveals a level of remaining distrust and an attempt to contain foreign influence. As trust increased over time, Dutch officials gained the ability to travel and collect items of their choosing, with the effect of shifting the original power dynamic laid down by

⁹ Mochizuki, Kaplan, Carlson, and Cruz. "Deciphering The Dutch In Deshima." In *Boundaries and Their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands*, 63-94. Vol. 48. Studies in Central European Histories. 2009.

¹⁰ Compton, James A., and Gerard Thijssse. "THE REMARKABLE P. F. B. VON SIEBOLD, HIS LIFE IN EUROPE AND JAPAN." *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* 30, no. 3 (2013): 275-314. Accessed May 26, 2020. doi:10.2307/45259028. 275

¹¹ *Ibid*, 276.

their Japanese hosts. Warehouse Master, Johannes Frederik van Overmeer Fisscher is responsible for collecting a multitude of goods during his nine year stay on Dejima from 1820 to 1829.¹² Slightly overlapping with Fisscher, Jan Cock Blomhoff, another long time resident of Dejima, acted as governor of the Dutch trading post from 1817 to 1823.¹³ It was Blomhoff, retiring Chief Merchant at the time, who welcomed the third collector Philipp Franz von Siebold and showed him the island firsthand.

Siebold is noteworthy among the collectors, not only for his many achievements and overseas exploits, but for having established his own museum of Japanese objects in his own home. This museum is still operating to this day, with modern temporary collections exhibited on the upper floors while Siebold's own private collection remains on permanent display on the ground floor. As has been discussed, the personal nature of the museum, being held in the actual private dwelling of the collector himself, has a noticeable effect on how the objects on display are interpreted by the visitor. In the panorama room of the Sieboldhuis Museum, his collection is displayed in floor to ceiling glass display cases where an attempt is made to roughly categorise the items. So varied is the collection that the categorisation process is loosely applied at best, with many objects occupying the same display with little to no relation to one another. The visitor is bombarded with information, as each unit holds many small items which are often unlabelled.

Siebold, an accomplished physician and researcher, was appointed Surgeon Mayor in the Dutch East Indies and being stationed on the Island of Dejima.¹⁴ It was during his court journey to see the shogun that Siebold seized the opportunity to collect plants and other items that he was ordinarily unable to encounter while stationed on Dejima. It was in 1827 that Siebold was summoned back to the Netherlands to give attention to the collections he amassed, some of

¹² Compton, James A., and Gerard Thijsse. "THE REMARKABLE P. F. B. VON SIEBOLD, HIS LIFE IN EUROPE AND JAPAN." *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* 30, no. 3 (2013): 275-314. Accessed May 26, 2020. doi:10.2307/45259028. 280

¹³ Mochizuki, Kaplan, Carlson, and Cruz. "Deciphering The Dutch In Deshima." In *Boundaries and Their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands*, 63-94. Vol. 48. Studies in Central European Histories. 2009.

¹⁴ Kouwenhoven, and Forrer, *Siebold and Japan: His life and work*, 9

which had been shipped before he left the island himself. On the return journey his ship was wrecked in a storm which revealed to Japanese authorities that Siebold carried contraband in the form of hand drawn maps of Japanese landscapes and coastlines among his possessions. It was due to Siebold's voracious appetite for knowledge coupled with his aptitude as a physician that granted him a somewhat demi-god like status among his Japanese peers.¹⁵ After the storm incident, he was banished from Japan and forced to return to the Netherlands. Although he had planned a return journey before this, the banishment meant that he could never return to Dejima to complete his research or visit his family.

The supply of maps to foreigners in this manner was punishable by death, along with any gift-giving of items that pertain to history. These maps were significant to Siebold as knowledge of the coastline and exact location of Japan was extremely limited during this time. The cartographer who provided these maps, named Sakuzaemon, was known for his precision and high level of detailing. The research conducted by Siebold while resident in Japan was only made possible by the obliging nature of his companions and guides. These events along with accounts of the man's notable character have since become part of the story behind his collection. Each item selected by Siebold reflects his taste and carries his intention to share Japanese culture with the rest of the world. Siebold's broad interests, curiosity and love for Japan and its people are chiefly responsible for his desire to collect and share the abundance of new and exciting items with those who had not the privilege to travel as he had. It is this social standing and status that gave him the power, as well as the platform, to communicate and showcase his interest in Japan with a western audience. A man of science with an aptitude for the study of flora and fauna, Siebold often collected materials, drawings and specimens relating to medicine and nature. A mannequin with pin points shows where needles are inserted for acupuncture alongside many glass jars containing the preserved carcasses of small marine animals and snakes, and some larger birds and mammals taxidermied for display

¹⁵ Compton, James A., and Gerard Thijsse. "THE REMARKABLE P. F. B. VON SIEBOLD, HIS LIFE IN EUROPE AND JAPAN." *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* 30, no. 3 (2013): 275-314. Accessed May 26, 2020. doi:10.2307/45259028. 284

in larger units. The true personal nature of the display is exposed when items from Siebold's private life appear on the units, including a taxidermied dog that he kept as a pet while in Japan. This reflects the personal nature of collecting items from overseas, much like the souvenir concept discussed earlier, the individual is essentially forming a collection of memories and displaying these as representations of culture. The subjectivity of the items selected for display show the influence of the collector over the aspects of a certain culture that the audience is exposed to. Due to the lack of widespread exposure to Japan at this time, the subjective can easily be considered the objective in a cultural display with few able to dispute the authenticity or accuracy of the exhibition to its subject matter. Siebold's social status and professional authority in his field also lent him power over the audience's interpretation of Japan.

Siebold was interested in collecting items that reflected, in some respect, all aspects of Japanese culture and the lifestyle of its native people. From art to boardgames and everyday objects such as brooms and storage jars, Siebold's fascination and deep rooted interest in Japanese culture is evident. The methods by which he sourced some of these objects are peculiar in their own right and worthy of consideration. Reputed to own a hollowed cane, Siebold would occasionally open the cane to conceal seeds and other flora inside during his walks. Also, while making the court visit, he would offer advise to those in need of medical attention and request objects in return. As Siebold did not show bias towards those with higher status, the range and kinds of objects received varied wildly.¹⁶ It was this propensity to collect secretly that also displays a certain power dynamic. His clandestine approach to the practice of collecting items from Japan does not indicate respect for Japanese authority, yet it sets out to illustrate and in a way, honour this culture in his homeland.

Upon his return to the Netherlands to arrange his collection of goods, Siebold was welcomed warmly and encouraged to set to work by King Willem I. The accommodation of his collection had not been arranged due to the fact that

¹⁶ Kouwenhoven, and Forrer, *Siebold and Japan: His life and work*, 30.

Blomhoff's collection had filled the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities already.¹⁷ To acknowledge the importance of Siebold's work, he was nominated for knighthood in 1831 in the Order of the Dutch Lion. Soon after this, Siebold was appointed as Superintendent Officer for Health. The taxing nature of cataloguing the collection became very clear rather quickly and became a time consuming distraction from writing his book *Nippon*. For this reason, Siebold appointed the task of cataloguing to an assistant, A. Hakbijl.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the collection had to first be transported from Antwerp to Leiden where it was deemed safer. The National Herbarium in Brussels also contained numerous crates of seeds and plant samples which also needed to be transported. Most of his collection however was already housed in Leiden's Museum of Natural History. Many of his live plants were being cared for in the Botanic Gardens of Leiden also, which influenced his decision to live nearby. Offered a teaching position in Leiden University, Siebold declined in order to focus on his research and study.

The opening of his "Japanese Collection", as he called it, within his home at number 19 Rapenburg in 1832 resulted in an influx of scholars and scientists visiting to study the display in person. Over the course of the next few years Siebold published chapters from several of his books including *Nippon*, *Fauna Japonica* and *Bibliotheca Japonica*. As well as these learned figures were dignitaries as recorded in the visitors book now located in Leiden University Library. It was Siebold's work *Nippon* which was viewed as his main work and is composed of a series of essays on varying topics.¹⁹ Appointed as Advisor to the King on Japanese Affairs, Siebold quickly went to work on advising the opening of Japan to a wider market. This was cleverly negotiated by Siebold through a letter composed on behalf of the King stating that the threat of war may arise with continued trade restrictions. Initially refusing this suggestion while thanking the King for his concern, Japan came under pressure to open its borders once foreign ships began to enter its waters. These included American whaling ships which occasionally became shipwrecked or stranded off the Japanese coast.

¹⁷ Ibid, 48.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 57.

Finally, after much additional pressure, the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed in 1854 allowing American ships to harbour in Shimoda and Hakodate and for an American consulate to be established in Shimoda also. This would prove to have negative consequences for Dutch trade, a point made by Jan Hendrik Donker Curtius who was resident on Dejima at the time of this Treaty being signed.²⁰ Trading arrangements would need to be rearranged between these two nations and it was Siebold who requested the position of advisor to the Minister of Colonies. It was decided that Siebold could be very beneficial to negotiations considering his history and knowledge of the country. Granted a permanent position as advisor, Siebold set to work on renewing permits that had been issued by the first shogun in the early seventeenth century. Along side these issues, Siebold knew there had always been private trade, called *Cambang*, conducted between the Dutch and Japanese that was not counted in the official Dutch East Indies reports. He decided to incorporate these going forward and requested being named the director of this operation to ensure it went according to plan. This position was given to another individual and it was soon discovered that the profits were excessive, serving to damage the reputation with regards to trade in the east.²¹ Continuously requesting new positions in which to use his influence and hard earned knowledge of affairs in Japan, the Dutch government gradually came to see his behaviour as an annoyance and finally dismissed him from his service in 1858. After an apology, Siebold was reappointed later the same year and his banishment from Japan was also lifted.

Siebold's collection can be viewed as ethnographic in nature, although the museum which incorporates his name, puts emphasis on the man behind the collection. The shifting meaning and purpose of the collection over time further reflects the change in focus from Japan-centred to collector-centred. Siebold was attempting to use material culture, with objects as primary data, to construct an image of Japanese culture and life.²² The limitations of the collection, as previously discussed, and the specificity of the time period within which the

²⁰ Ibid, 63.

²¹ Ibid, 64.

²² Prown, J. D., 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 1982, p1

objects were accumulated disconnect the collection from a modern-day audience. These objects no longer inform the viewer solely about Japanese culture but rather about a time in history and an important player in Dutch-Japanese relations. The collector's power over the choice of artefacts for display as well as the personal connection to the items cloud the contemporary visitor's understanding of culture and instead highlight the incredible influence of the individual behind the collection over the subject matter on display.

It was in 1837 that the Dutch government promised to purchase the collections of Siebold, Blomhoff and Fisscher, storing and displaying many of the artefacts across its museums.²³ After Japan reopened trade in 1858, a historic event by all means, the collection that Siebold painstakingly assembled is seen to be impacted. No longer closed from the world, the Japanese objects obtained at this time are somewhat less mysterious and less exclusive, now dated to a period of history whereby these two nations enjoyed exclusive trade. Siebold was involved in this process of negotiations, and with his banishment revoked, allowing for a return visit to take place from 1859 to 1862. In his sixties at this point, Siebold relished the prospect of returning and packed all of his scientific equipment for the conducting of further research upon arrival. Eager to revisit the country he loved dearly, he also wished to introduce new technologies to the east including the printing press. In contradiction, Siebold's letters to friends show a fear of changing the cultural climate of Japan "now threatened by a European culture with all its horror and misery".²⁴ Before departing once again for Japan, Siebold decided to leave his ethnographic collection to Dr Conradus Leemans who worked as the director of, what is today, the National Museum of Antiquities. Leemans both relocated and retitled the collection "The National Japanese Museum Von Siebold". Siebold's mission was to deliver a new trade treaty to Edo, a job he was honoured to carry out. The island of Dejima had changed in many ways since Siebold had been there last and Curtius Donker, the Opperhoofd at that time, explained the situation after the banishment so many

²³ Compton, James A., and Gerard Thijssse. "THE REMARKABLE P. F. B. VON SIEBOLD, HIS LIFE IN EUROPE AND JAPAN." *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* 30, no. 3 (2013): 275-314. Accessed May 26, 2020. doi:10.2307/45259028. 291

²⁴ Kouwenhoven, and Forrer, *Siebold and Japan: His life and work*, 66.

years previous. Many of Siebold's acquaintances had been imprisoned or banished due to their affiliation with Siebold and the creation of forbidden maps and measurement of landscape features including Mount Fuji. It became apparent that the American and British traders were almost entirely disinterested in Japanese culture and held an attitude of disdain for the Japanese' lack of knowledge regarding their own nations.²⁵ Following the opening of its borders the city of Edo became unsafe for foreigners due to increased attacks. After sharing a difference of opinion regarding the opening of certain ports to foreign trade, Siebold was made to withdraw from Japan.

The assemblage of objects to form part of a new collection reflects the politically motivated desire to authenticate the connection between these two countries.²⁶ The objects can be seen to create a historical narrative relating to power, influence and trade prowess in the east. Today, this collection of Japanese artefacts dating to the period in question are shared between several museums across the Netherlands. The four case studies to be discussed in later chapters are all currently on display in the Volkenkunde Museum located in Leiden where they each contribute to a display dedicated to Japanese culture. While objects from this collection are also on display in the Rijksmuseum, the national museum of the Netherlands, and in the Sieboldhuis Museum, a house-museum dedicated to the life and work of physician and collector Philipp Franz von Siebold, it is the Volkenkunde museum which perhaps showcases the complex power plays of the miniatures to the greatest effect. It is here that the miniatures are used for much the same purpose as they were at the time of collection in the 19th Century: to communicate Japanese culture. However, the passage of time and the nature of the display has altered both the function and the meaning of these objects. While in some ways their functions remain unchanged, being rooted in this period of historical significance means that they are now antique objects in their own right. To look upon one of these objects is to look back and reflect upon a time in history and upon the individuals involved in active collection of such objects. It is this changed and layered meaning that adds inextricably to the complexity and

²⁵ Ibid, 69.

²⁶ Stewart, *On Longing : Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 143

multi-faceted nature of these miniatures. The case studies have been selected due to this rich history and unique connection, as well as the layered meanings and functions, which have both evolved and morphed over time.

The items collected and transported from Japan back to the Netherlands in the 1800s carried a wealth of information and meaning. The logistical concerns regarding the transport of items by ship over a long distance resulted in limitations regarding what could and couldn't be brought back. Naturally, larger scale and heavier objects proved more difficult to transport. This is where the practical element of the miniature is evident. As detailed representations of the life sized objects, miniatures could depict architectural styles, industry and lifestyle in a compact package. They were the ideal solution to these issues surrounding transportation for collectors. However, the process of selecting, collecting and even commissioning pieces from Japan is deeply connected to the individual responsible and therefore, the resulting impression of culture is unavoidably subjective. The power of representation lies with the collectors, who offer a Dutch perspective on Japanese culture.

Chapter 2

Ethnographic Museums and the role of the 19th Century Dutch collector in the creation of cultural narratives

“With increasing specialization in the museum sector, the creation of exhibitions has become the province of specialist designers and educators who focus on communicating key messages via a vast array of display strategies.”²⁷

Undoubtedly, much of the museum’s power lies in its ability to create knowledge through its various exhibitions and collections. The visitor experiences these according to a variety of factors including the museum display strategy, what is chosen for display, and even the museum space itself. It is typical for large scale national museums to house vast collections of objects from different sources, collected at different times by varying means. As outlined by Moser, ethnographic material relates to the historical context and meaning behind the museum building itself.²⁸

Moser outlines a methodological framework by which this knowledge creation can be understood in any given museum space. This complex network of factors are worth considering when entering a museum space to fully grasp how the curator intends the visitor to interpret the space and what they are expected to learn coming away from it. Museums create knowledge by constructing narratives through objects and text. This can be overlooked by the average lay person who accepts what is shown as a display of fact rather than a construction of a narrative. Museums are commonly simplified as useful aids for the dissemination of information to the public. Rather than behaving as a mere translation of academic knowledge for the non-academic, museum displays make use of open interpretation to actively create knowledge and evolve ideas.²⁹ These

²⁷ Moser, *The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge*, 22

²⁸ Ibid, 23.

²⁹ Ibid, 22.

ideas can be brought before an audience using a wide variety of display strategies which go beyond mere display to create an *experience* for the visitor.³⁰ Moser argues that this experience is formed through the interaction of several different devices in the museum space including lighting, space, display arrangement to name but a few. The relationship between these devices and the content of the display is rather complex. The architecture of the building is perhaps the first element of the museum which strikes the visitor. Moser explains that Classical architecture references the 19th Century's imperial age connoting ideas of power and influence exerted in Europe and rooted in ancient Greek and Roman history. The predominant use of Classical architecture for government buildings and banks alludes to the authority and power of this architectural style. Meanwhile cathedrals can give the impression of tradition and national achievement. Modern structures give a sense of the contemporary, perhaps lending a temporal and immediate relevance to the collection housed within, in other words, an emphasis on the "here and now" rather than on permanence and timelessness.

After architecture, the visitor is presented with the museum space itself. Moser further explains that this includes both the dimensions of the display rooms as well as the creation of flow within these rooms. The positioning of display cases dictates the route which the visitor must take when navigating the exhibition, and can encourage movement in a certain direction as desired by the curator. The size of the space can range from grand and intimidating to small and intimate, the former imbuing the exhibition with importance and authority while the latter perhaps invites individual interpretation. In other words, the space directly influences the visitor's perception of the exhibit and what they understand from its content. The size of the space also plays with the human perception of scale, in this way. Much like the miniature model, a grand space inspires awe through its vastness and focuses the mind on the expanse while a tight or intimate space brings with it the feeling of confinement.

³⁰ Ibid, 23.

The visual impression of the space and exhibition are achieved through the use of colour, light and design in general. The design or style can give context to the display and can shape the message being put across by the curator and museum at large. Moser points out that older buildings often retain their original appearance to preserve their history. This can have the effect of clashing with the display or simply framing it inappropriately. Creating a sense of grandeur or drama through the use of light and design can lend a certain monumentality to the exhibit and therefore give the impression of superiority or power. It can also be interpreted by the visitor as a confident celebration of the subject matter, displayed “loud and proud” as it were. This clash between the architecture of the space and the display could be a feature in an ethnology museum, where classical elements may distract from the culture being exhibited. A modern “clean” feel to a space can be a blank canvas on which to display. Perhaps imparting a sense of the contemporary onto the exhibition, this undoubtedly imposes the least onto the objects displayed. The same can be said of the use of neutral colours over bright or vivid colour schemes. A neutral and muted space allows the exhibition to speak for itself, without needing to vie for attention with distracting bursts of vivid colour. Colours not only evoke certain emotions but they can also be related to nations or periods in history.³¹ Similar to colour, the lighting used in a display and its surrounding room can have a big impact on the mood of the visitor through its effect on the ambiance and atmosphere of the space. A bright space with plenty of natural light can feel airy and rather contemporary. Conversely a dark space can give a sense of a time in history, suited to a period such as the Medieval Era or more appropriately in this context, the Dark Ages. There is an element of escapism and theatricality to a space that is made darker, as the visitor leaves the bright outdoors to enter an unnaturally dark and pensive space. By introducing individual spotlights to illuminate the objects on display, the curator creates a sense of drama and spectacle.

Continuing along this line, it comes as no surprise that accompanying text is a major factor when interpreting an exhibition. While visual elements are somewhat open to interpretation, text can be rather direct and explicit in

³¹ Moser, *The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge*, 26

shaping the visitor's understanding of what they are seeing. In the case that an exhibition is telling the story of an event, it makes sense to arrange the objects in chronological order with text that supports and places the individual pieces within this timeframe. This, however, has the effect of creating a direction in which the visitor is intended to move, which has the potential to cause frustration when crowds accumulate and traffic flow is poor.

This leads to the issue of display distribution and general layout. Moser suggests that meaning is also created through this interaction with the surrounding space and circulation within the museum galleries. Placing objects next to one another can affect how the visitor interprets them or connects them together. Within display cases, it is easier to play objects off one another, creating comparisons and contrasts. This effect can be broken if they are displayed at different heights or angles from one another, giving the impression that despite their proximity they are to be viewed as individual pieces rather than part of an associated collective. Additionally, spacing objects apart gives the sense that they are not closely associated with one another and instead stand alone as separately important pieces. Cluttering a display with an array of objects can create the impression that the exhibition is showing a treasure hoard or a display of curiosities, a popular method of display during the Renaissance.³² The placement of objects in specific locations also has the effect of giving prominence to certain pieces over others. This instructs the visitor that some pieces are worthy of extra attention or focus due to their quality, importance, rarity or any other number of reasons. The selection of certain facts while omitting others shows another aspect of how the museum shapes the meaning of an exhibition. Providing information is a more complex practice than is accounted for, and has the effect of guiding the visitor's understanding of events. The manner in which the text is written also impacts the exhibition, as an academic style can be seen to elevate the status of the items while a more casual, colloquial style may be used for ease of understanding and to reach a younger demographic. Moser argues that the academic style can be intimidating for some as it gives an authoritative voice to the exhibition and implies the field require a

³² Moser, *The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge*, 27

certain level of expertise to fully comprehend it. Alternatively, a journalistic approach encourages the visitor to engage through its approachable style. Font style and size can also have a similar effect to writing style.³³

Often associated with the provision of specialised knowledge and information, as previously stated, part of a museum's power lies in its ability to employ different styles to shape or aid this process. Themes are a common tool used to unify collections, for example. However, it can also be argued that the importance of the museum lies also in creating a space in which the visitor may encounter the artefacts in person.³⁴ The communication of key ideas is also central to a museum's purpose, expanding the viewpoint of the public or showing a less common perspective on an existing belief or system.

The meaning of the objects on display are seen to change over time, while the change in context which occurs when an object has, for example, travelled overseas also affects how it is perceived and how it functions under these new conditions. The majority of objects that are put on display are naturally severed from their original purpose and environment. This is perhaps the greatest change that is undergone by exhibition pieces, as they require a reinterpretation according to their new surroundings.

It is also evident that the *type* of museum instructs the visitor on what they are to expect before entering and in what context they are to consider the displays and objects. For example, a trauma-site museum is commemorative, respectful, solemn and informative. This is understandably the case, being a rather confrontational type of museum built at the location of a devastating event or historical atrocity, and draws on the power of that connection to move the visitor. A childhood museum conversely is nostalgic, fun, light-hearted, amusing and informative. Often displaying toys from different periods of time, these are aimed at a wide demographic as they relate to the childhood of all generations. The purpose of a museum, to record, preserve, inform, educate, entertain, inspire and more, is shaped by the museum's "mission". The many functions of the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, 29.

museum are reflected in the multi-faceted nature of the objects contained within, and how these objects work together and with their environment to create a narrative.

While the museum building, lighting and space are clearly influential, they are a collective framing device for the exhibition pieces themselves. If the museum is the stage, then its content is the performer. With this in mind, it is no surprise that objects which inspire, which are layered and complex and which function as informative and aesthetic can be seen to deliver the highest impact in a display. It is for this reason that the appeal and multitude of functions that the miniature possesses makes it such a quality piece for a display.

The museum is constantly evolving in an attempt to stay relevant to a modern audience. At any one time, the museum must satisfy several functions added to the imperative to change and evolve. Predominantly viewed as an educational institution, the museum's continued funding is derived from this core function.³⁵ Providing knowledge also allows for the opportunity to expand one's mind for the consideration of new ideas and perspectives. Hooper Greenhill examines the role of the museum in the present day through the lens of Foucault's work, examining the rationality and so-called common sense that can be too readily accepted without question. Reason and truth are understood as relative rather than absolute concepts with contexts according to the society and culture which establishes them.³⁶ According to Foucault, this is determined by the power relationship present between the nations in question and is affected by the processes at play. The state of perpetual change and evolution of cultures and societies means that what is considered rational in the present will likely not be considered rational in the future. Likewise, the present understanding of events is not in line with that of the past. Rejecting chronology and structure in history means embracing the errors and chaos of the past, described here as "effective history". This gives new tools for reading past events, focusing on the errors rather than the truths. Introducing the concept of *epistemes*, that is, the set of

³⁵ Hooper Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 2.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

knowledge and rationality producing relations, Foucault examines the different elements which relate to one another in the process of creating knowledge. The three major *epistemes* include the Renaissance, the Classical and the modern, each with their own set of distinctive characteristics which place them apart from one another. The change from one to another represents a huge shift in the construction of knowledge. While the Renaissance focused on interpretation, the Classical *episteme* was structured and orderly, and the modern looks into the reason why things are as they are.³⁷ Although Foucault only approaches the topic of museums by referencing historical collections, he undeniably adopts an interesting standpoint in relation to the changing treatment of knowledge over time.

Although the British Museum comes to mind for most when considering the earliest museums, the house museum is arguable the earliest kind in actuality. As Hooper Greenhill points out, the Medici Palace in Florence dating to the fifteenth century can be regarded as one of the first of its kind. Belonging to a powerful and influential merchant family at a time when mercantile trading was producing much wealth, the Medici Palace is seen to be a type of status symbol. The creation of knowledge through the collections housed within such a stately house museum pertains to the creation of status and dominance.³⁸ Existing at a time when Italy had little in the way of a national identity, this type of house museum stood for the wealthy merchant class as the state's symbol of power. Translating to "rebirth", the Renaissance saw the rejection of the recent past, in some instances, in favour of seeking new ideas and truths alongside the more ancient history of antiquity. This includes the display of the secular arts within these palaces, used to showcase a contemporary aesthetic reflecting the merchant status and influence while referencing ancient Rome to create a sense of knowledge of origin and a sense of the greatness of the Roman Empire. Collections began to reflect this desire to demonstrate knowledge of the classical past. Any kind of connection was sought after, to the extent that merchants were using rubble from ancient buildings in the construction of their private homes

³⁷ Ibid, 15.

³⁸ Ibid, 24.

and palaces. This need to connect with the past through the collection and display of ancient objects carries forward into the modern museum environment.

The emphasis on visual material culture when creating knowledge is prevalent in the modern world. However, as Gillian Rose states, it is unclear what is to be interpreted from the visual and whether it can be counted as a type of language in its own right. As an image is open to interpretation it may carry a number of meanings for different viewers depending on their prior knowledge and experiences. There is no definitive “truth” behind an image, it is only an interpretation.³⁹ However, interpretations can be explained or justified, giving a reason to their formation. The meaning behind visual media may be attributed to some extent to the cultural significance of the object. Rendering the world through a visual medium offers insight into the workings of the societies which produced them. Rose introduces the distinction that must be made between vision and visuality, whereby vision constitutes what the eye is capable of seeing while visuality signifies how the eye sees and how it is made to see.⁴⁰ The cultural construction of what is seen is here referred to as scopic regime, dominated by simulations that are completely unconnected from the real world. The field of visual culture can be considered for five elements which illuminate the social effects of images. According to Rose, these include the image as visual resistance, as a visualisation of social difference, the image in terms of how it is viewed by the observer, the embedding of the visual image in wider culture and finally that the observer of the image may be resistant.⁴¹ The museum visitor is therefore seen to bring their own perspective to the collections and objects they observe.

Upon entering the Japan and Korea exhibition room of the Volkenkunde Museum, the visitor is first struck by the size of the space. A long but generously wide room, equipped with a high ceiling, the display cases are set to encourage the visitor to roam freely rather than creating a specific route. The first half of

³⁹ Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies : An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, 2

⁴⁰ Ibid, 6.

⁴¹ Ibid, 20.

the room is dedicated to Japan and despite the room's capacity, the curators have chosen to display fewer objects, each intended to illustrate an aspect of Japanese culture in a clean and paired back manner, without overloading the visitor with excessive information and visual stimulus. This clean approach to display certainly has the effect of minimising distraction while also putting an added emphasis on the selection of objects and how these work, either together or separately, to communicate to the visitor in a meaningful way. The separate display cases and juxtaposition of unrelated objects suggests the pieces are intended to "stand alone", each with its own individual commentary rather than continuing a narrative as a collective whole. It is in the context of this exhibition that the four miniatures are displayed in pairs.

In the Volkenkunde, less is more. The displays are paired back with emphasis on a small number of "quality" objects over the vast treasure hoard effect visible in Leiden's Sieboldhuis Museum. Choosing to display fewer objects has the effect of placing added attention on those selected for display. This is where the miniature is employed to great effect. The multi-faceted nature and layered effect of the miniatures creates entire compact worlds in the gallery space. In this way, a huge amount of information can be communicated through these pieces. A complete domestic space equipped with furnishings and cutlery not only shows artistry and style but also a way of life. The visitor is at once educated and also mesmerised by the craftsmanship and skilled rendering of these tiny replicas. The materials are true to the originals, creating further duality between the object's informative power and awe inspiring attention to detail. Commissioned by a collector in the Dutch East India Company adds a layer of historical significance to the piece while the design of the object clearly intended for ease of transport alludes to the distance it was transported on its journey to its current display, as will be discussed further throughout the case study chapters.

Chapter 3

Miniaturising the domestic: examining the Kitchen case study as a visual descriptor of Japanese daily life and craft

The first miniature to be discussed is the Japanese kitchen (fig. 1) commissioned by Jan Cock Blomhoff and dating from 1800 - 1823.⁴² Depicting a domestic living space in miniature, this piece provides the viewer with an abundance of information on the private quarters and lifestyle of an average Japanese person of this period. There is no human figurine to give an idea of scale, instead the vast array of everyday objects such as cups and pots as well as the height of the room itself allude to the actual size of the real life space that is being replicated.

It is the intricate detail of the miniature objects that draws the most attention. Not only have these been rendered exquisitely well, they have also been crafted from the same materials as the prototype objects which they replicate including porcelain, metal, wood and lacquer (fig. 2). The cabinets, shelves and drawers are a unique feature of this miniature serving as working storage areas thoughtfully provided for the many tiny pieces displayed. This serves the function of accurately representing the original space upon which it was designed while also allowing for the safe keeping of the many pieces. The importance of storage is both depicted within the miniature and in its construction. The piece works as a kind of cupboard, whereby each of the outer flanks can be closed inwards, allowing the piece to be carefully and efficiently transported to another location if desired. This is likely to have been considered to facilitate the transportation process back to the Netherlands. Careful consideration has also been given to the appearance of the miniature, aside from

⁴² NMVW Collection, Accessed 26 May 2020, <https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/default.aspx?lang=en#/query/a8f7a71b-1174-4ca4-b5ce-6f0233c193f1>

accuracy of replication. The decoratively carved wood at the front of the piece and the delicate stepped legs on which it stands indicate that it was constructed with aesthetic appeal in mind.

The complexity of this miniature lies in the multiple functions which it serves both at the time of its creation and currently in its present display. Commissioned, rather than simply collected, by Blomhoff, it is an educational piece informing the viewer visually of the lifestyle, objects, crafts, materials and general aesthetic of Japanese culture in the 19th Century. The exquisitely fine and minute detail of the pieces inspire awe by the sheer skill of their craftsmanship while the use of real life materials triggers fascination relating to scale and resulting in a sense of altered reality. Mostly symmetrical in design and decoratively carved for display, the miniature is an aesthetically pleasing, artistic and visually stimulating object in its own right. Adding to this the historical context of the piece and it's creation during a time of exclusive trade between the Netherlands and Japan, it displays not only an impression of Japan from that time period but also of the Dutch collectors endeavouring to capture the essence of the country during their travels. Constructed in situ and intended for delivery back to Europe, the piece is made to fold up for ease of transportation, another allusion to the time period and a detail of its journey, evolving the miniature's meaning as it passes from one culture to another.

Commissioned by Jan Cock Blomhoff for the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in the Hague, this kitchen model alludes to a level of "true depiction" in its quality of manufacture and attention to detail. This not only conveys an attempt to accurately capture Japanese domesticity of the time, it also displays an understanding and cataloguing of Japanese craft from Chinaware bowls to copper kettles and lacquered serving trays. To choose to display such craft ware in miniature form suggests a desire to display the *whole* rather than the individual objects. The relationship between the items is the focus here, including their use and placement within the Japanese kitchen space. It is not merely a study of craft, but rather a study on what the daily application of such items may look like. To show the domestic sphere in it's entirety like this can be considered an attempt to display "otherness" through this showcase of an

alternative lifestyle. To display any of the items featured as a life-sized object by itself would instead place emphasis on the artistry and craft, and serve to dislocate the object from its original setting in the Japanese home.

The fact that Blomhoff commissioned this piece is significant in itself. This is a miniature that served no function other than to convey visual information to a non-Japanese audience. Having this power to inform an otherwise removed audience in the west shows how absolute the influence of the collector is on their exhibition as a whole, and on the impression of Japanese culture. The portrayed accuracy of representation is clearly centered on the miniature objects rather than the kitchen setting itself. As mentioned, the design of the miniature takes transportation into account and therefore features two wings, one on either side, that may be folded to close and contain the miniature to protect its many pieces during long journeys. This design feature shows a preference for practicality over accuracy, which has the effect of prioritizing the collector's needs over the informative function of the piece in a museum. Again, the ultimate power and influence over representation lies in the hands of its creator. It is also possible that this folding design served to conceal its contents, perhaps to avoid unwanted scrutiny from Japanese authorities during pre-transit inspections. The objective was to collect items of peculiar interest to the Dutch officials, not necessarily to abide by the rules imposed by their Japanese hosts.

Being a model representation of a domestic space, the relationship between this miniature and a miniature plaything, such as a dollhouse, is undeniable. As discussed previously, the depiction of a domestic space in miniature form is subconsciously, if not consciously, considered to belong to the sphere of toys and childhood. The Volkenkunde museum actually displays this piece lower to the ground, which is likely intended to accommodate easier viewing for the younger visitor. Highlighting its connection to dollhouses and apparent appeal to children has the effect of coloring the miniature as playful. If power lies with the observer rather than the object of observation, then this playful depiction of culture has the effect of downplaying the significance and even the dignity of its subject matter.

The reproduction of these traditional Japanese wares in miniature form can also be viewed in light of the concept of powerful observer dominating an object of interest. There is evidently a high level of skill required to make such high-detailed and accurate pieces, the execution of which can be perceived as a proud statement of Dutch culture, investment in education and confidence in the ability to do what others can to a comparable degree of quality. This miniaturized replication of life-sized objects which have a practical function in a kitchen space can be viewed as a high-status luxury hobby, much like the Oortman dollhouse in the Rijksmuseum. Removing the practical function as originally intended and replacing it with an educational and aesthetic function places emphasis on the collector's attitudes towards his nation's culture, elevated mindset and advanced civilization.

Chapter 4

Miniaturising industrial processes: examining the Mine Shaft case study as a visual descriptor of Japanese industry and resource

Situated in the same display case as the kitchen miniature is the second case study, a miniature model of a mineshaft (fig. 3) collected by J. F. van Overmeer Fisscher and dating from 1800 - 1829. Similar to the kitchen, this mineshaft miniature was constructed so that it could fold and be closed entirely. This is perhaps intended for transportation but also may allude to the desire for secrecy. Naturally, by closing the piece the subject is hidden from view and considering the nature of the subject and the period to which it dates, this is possibly a factor that was taken into consideration during its build. Thought to actually represent a silver or gold mine rather than a copper mine, as it was originally labelled, this was almost certainly not permitted by any authority when created. Reportedly made by miners on the island of Sado off the island of Honshû, the area was associated with a penal colony for hundreds of years where escape was all but impossible.⁴³ Much mystery surrounds this piece, and it remains unclear what the original purpose might have been. This aspect may serve to strengthen its appeal to a contemporary audience and perhaps even to its original audience.

While the kitchen tells the story of Japanese domestic life, the mineshaft can be seen to show an example of Japanese industry. The process by which ore is extracted from the earth is displayed here in the many cavernous chambers and passages in which the figures are positioned. Ladders, pulleys, ropes, scaffolding, and even wooden buttressing are all included to give an image of a working mineshaft. Figures are depicted extracting ore from visible veins, transporting the ore and operating a series of pulleys possibly in order to clean the raw

⁴³ NMVW Collection, Accessed 26 May 2020, <https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/default.aspx?lang=en#/query/bed8b783-83e1-4633-adeb-ee7ac6f9d2aa>

material (fig. 4). The inclusion of climbing ladders to reach different areas of the shaft and scaffolds alludes to the real-life elements of working the mines, whereby the logistics of moving within the mines and of reaching the ore are central to depicting this industry accurately.

The aesthetic appeal has also been taken into consideration but interestingly it is the exterior rather than the interior which shows greater artistry. The rounded exterior of the mine (fig. 5), better viewed when the piece is closed, is covered in painted hills representing the outdoors and creating contrast between peace and industriousness by representing nature outside of the confines of the man-made mineshafts and galleries. Although mysterious in origin, the function is almost certainly educational, showing the ore extraction process on this secretive island. The attention to visual appeal implies it was intended to be admired for its artistic qualities also. The materials used in the creation of the miniature include wood, fabric and paper mache. Such construction materials may be considered humble, however the importance of material is at the core of the piece's subject matter: metal ore.

In terms of function, it is noteworthy that the mine is also displayed rather low to the floor. Again, this is likely intended to allow children to view this object more easily. Although far too delicate to be played with by children, there is an element of playfulness to these particular miniatures that has been utilised by the curators to appeal to a younger audience. While the remarkable resemblance between the kitchen miniature and a child's dollhouse is noticeable, the mineshaft goes further to include small human figurines much like children's toys. Each of these figurines appears to be modelled in the same manner, none representing an individual but rather the whole representing a collective workforce. In this case, these human figures act as props used to show an industrial process and perhaps to give a sense of scale to the underground tunnels. Focusing on the human being as a tool for industry has the effect of deemphasising the humanity of such real-life miners. This reveals a stark contrast between the mineshaft's original function and the contemporary mission statement of the Volkenkunde museum which aims to place humanity at the centre of each exhibition. The miniature's preoccupation with the process of

mining also neglects to show the working conditions which were faced by such miners. The miner figurines are expressionless and the mineshafts rendered as clean smooth spaces. The act of showing a cross-section of a subterranean space also gives a false impression of the conditions as light spills into the cavernous tunnels of the miniature. It is likely the case that this overly sanitised representation of mining is responsible for transforming the subject matter into appropriate viewing for younger audiences, and hence positioned in a display case lower to the floor. The choice of representation, no matter how misleading it may be when compared to the real life space it depicts, clearly lies with the collector and the information conveyed indicates their individual biases and interests.

The mystery surrounding the origins of this piece potentially alludes to the secrecy of its contents. The two segments connected by a hinge can be closed together concealing the mineshaft interior, however as the contents are composed of inexpensive and less fragile materials, when compared to the kitchen miniature, it seems less likely that this hinge design was made entirely for the sake of protecting them from damage. The pieces inside reveal a network of activity, intended to show different aspects and human roles involved in the process of ore extraction. It is not surprising that a Dutch official may be interested in Japan's natural resources and processes of industry considering his national colonial background. It may be from this perspective that Fisscher approached this aspect of Japanese culture, revealing a display of power derived from the gathering and documentation of information regarding resources. The exposure of natural resources also indicates economic wealth, which would certainly be an area of interest for a visiting official to Japan. However, it is noteworthy that such secret representation of such activities can be made against the wishes of their Japanese hosts. It can reasonably be assumed that the discovery of such a piece would have resulted in banishment and perhaps arrest for those responsible for the mine miniature's construction. Similar to Siebold's attempted smuggling of maps, this piece is not only a study of industry but a study of the landscape and its resources. The act of collecting information that is prohibited is in a sense a statement of superiority; that this information is

deserved and therefore fair to exploit and share once detection is avoided. The deceit of committing such an act against the Japanese nation reveals a lack of regard, or rather, a prioritisation of personal gain and the accumulation of potentially valuable information.

As a commissioned piece, much like the kitchen miniature, the power of representation can again be seen to lie with the collector. In this case, the collector is not only delivering a visual representation of a particular industrial process, there is also an implicit statement on comprehension of such processes. Each role and stage of ore extraction is being depicted which in turn shows a level of understanding of such practices on the part of the collector.

Chapter 5

Miniaturising belief systems: examining the Shrine case studies as visual descriptors of Japanese spiritualism and religious practice

The final two miniatures are both miniature model shrines displayed next to each other in a separate display case from the kitchen and mineshaft miniatures. On the right is the pagoda shrine (fig. 6), made of wood, gold lacquer and metal, this piece was made to resemble a life-sized shrine and used to contain sacred Buddhist objects and texts.⁴⁴ Originally placed inside Buddhist temples, this miniature showcases features of Japanese architecture. The Shinto shrine miniature (fig. 7) made of wood and metal also resembles a larger shrine structure with more modest architectural features than those seen on the pagoda shrine. Similarly severed from its intended setting, this shrine is intended for use in the home where offerings such as food and incense could be placed in front of it.⁴⁵ The architectural features stimulate scale-change response in the viewer while the symmetry and simplified rendering create a balanced and overall aesthetically pleasing piece. As with so many museum objects, the functions of these shrines have altered to serve the purpose of the display, and here provide an insight into the religious practices and culture of Japanese natives of this time period. Again, layered with a historical context and thought to have been collected by an assistant of Siebold, these miniatures were repurposed as educational tools, showing architecture, religious practice and culture, craftsmanship as well as local materials.

Although they are displayed next to each other and are similar in terms of size, theme and rendering of Japanese architecture, the differences that can be observed between these two shrines illuminate core differences in original intended function on behalf of the collector. One such difference lies in the

⁴⁴ NMVW Collection, Accessed 26 May 2020, <https://collectie.wereldculture.nl/default.aspx?lang=en#/query/cda301f1-5f23-4423-bbdf-a38d71d82d30>

⁴⁵ NMVW Collection, Accessed 26 May 2020, <https://collectie.wereldculture.nl/default.aspx?lang=en#/query/fdedbcde-cf74-4f3e-a459-683f24ebdc31>

aesthetics with the pagoda shrine showing elements that are rather ornate and even exaggerated. The emphasis is not on accuracy of replication nor was the original function to educate the viewer. This piece is displayed very much out of context, severed from its original temple setting and no longer used for its intended purpose: to store sacred objects. The gold lacquer alludes to its value as a religious object while the tiny bells add an element of extravagant decoration to its exterior. As the shrine miniature serves a working function, the play on scale can be seen as being rather secondary in terms of importance. The Shinto shrine is significantly less opulent in appearance and in its materials. Both shrines are attributed to an assistant of Siebold, and their difference in appearance is consistent with Siebold's shift in taste in relation to the collection of items. Originally enticed by rare and opulent pieces Siebold is seen to gradually become more interested in the every day objects used in Japanese culture. This shift reflects not only in the differing aesthetic but also in the shrines' original setting. The gold lacquered pagoda shrine would have featured in the spiritually important setting of a temple space. Conversely, the Shinto shrine was intended for the average humble home. The gold finish with bells versus the plain wood and the elevated setting of the temple versus the domestic space shows a definitive difference in status. This change in focus for collectors such as Siebold shows a newfound interest in the less extravagant lifestyle of the average Japanese citizen (fig. 8). Part of Siebold's collection still on display in the Sieboldhuis Museum clearly reflects this with display cases containing even the most basic of household items including brooms and fishing equipment. This focus on the common and less glorified every day object gives a sense that Siebold's intention aimed to show authentic Japan rather than a sensationalised version featuring only the finest artworks which would only be available to those with wealth. This attempt at representing authenticity of culture does not, however, remove the power status of the collector from the equation. Siebold and his assistants were in a position to select what is shown, and of the every day objects, they choose which ones reveal more and give more important information regarding Japanese culture. The personal perspective as well as the choice of object are in the hands of the collector.

A noteworthy difference can also be seen with regards to the attributed dates. The pagoda shrine dates to within the Dutch – Japanese trade exclusivity timeframe, while the Shinto shrine perhaps lies slightly outside of this. If this later date is in fact more accurate it would indicate a continued interest in obtaining artefacts despite other nations' ability to do so. This might suggest a certain belief of authority over the subject matter and a commitment, or even a responsibility, towards the continued collection and display of objects relating to Japanese culture.

In contrast to the low display of the kitchen and mineshaft, the shrines are displayed in a higher position at approximately adult eye-level. Decidedly less playful in appearance and therefore not aimed at a young audience, these pieces also garner respect as once functioning religious objects, removing them further from the aforementioned association between miniatures and playthings. Emphasising this even further is the inherent focus on the exterior rather than the interior space. The dollhouse aesthetic is largely based on the display of an interior domestic space with miniature furnishings and doll figurines. The kitchen miniature satisfies the furnished domestic interior aspect while the mineshaft miniature includes human figurines and an added play on exterior and interior. The shrine miniatures in contrast, act as temple duplicates with tiny interiors that serve to suggest an interior realm rather than placing emphasis on it.

A significant difference between the shrine miniatures and the two previously discussed miniatures is that they were not commissioned by the collector but were instead made by and used for Japanese citizens to facilitate worship. As mentioned, the inclusion of such objects in a museum setting changes their original function and meaning. This change in context effectively gives the shrines a new purpose in delivering information not only about religion but about the worship practices of citizens from this time. To a museum audience which is removed from such practices, these objects can appear mystical and representative of otherness.

Since these were designed for and by Japanese craftsmen much more of their representative power lies with the Japanese people. Collectors and museum curators still have much influence due to their power of selection for display, but these “found” pieces reveal a perspective on Japan that is curated by Japanese people themselves. Much like the dollhouse examples mentioned earlier, having the power to represent ones own domain in miniature lends those individuals a certain mastery over the world they inhabit. These shrines were made with a function in mind for the local population and even when displaced from their original setting, can still be seen to reflect this original function.

Conclusion: Considering the miniaturization of culture and the resulting power dynamics created in the museum display

Power can present itself in different ways, and lies on a spectrum ranging from minor influence to complete dominance or superiority. This so called dominance can be merely perceived rather than existing in reality, however this can play a crucial part in the transfer or representation of information to an audience. The power dynamics involved in the representation of culture can originate from many places. The colonial history, the social standing of specific individuals or the body of an institution can all play a part and exert their own influence over representation. Aside from power dynamics, the use of miniatures in the museum space is widespread. They provide a practical solution for the communication of information regarding large structures such as buildings, temples, domestic dwellings and more. More than a mere replica, the miniature takes on its own meaning through having its own distinctive purpose separate from the object or structure which it resembles. When considered as a type of souvenir, the miniature stands for the experience and the memory of that experience. The shrine miniatures best exemplify this change of purpose, a replica of the temple structure, it rather stands for experience and is kept as an object of nostalgia. Triggering memory of a time passed, the miniature allows its owner to, in a sense, *possess* the monument and create a personal connection to it. The kitchen model is used as an exemplar of a typical domestic space, the mine shaft alludes to industriousness while excavating minerals and the secrecy which surrounds this practice within Japan, while the shrines mystery and spiritualism of the “other”. As well as the element of possession, miniatures are used to give the illusion of control in a chaotic and unpredictable world. Here, the fine details combine with the creator’s planning to make a miniature world that is entirely unique and controlled. Adding to the impression of scale alteration, often miniature human figures are included to complete the scene and give a sense of life to the world that has been constructed. Emphasis is on the power of illusion here, with the most effective miniatures used to inspire awe and wonder with regards to the techniques of their creation and accuracy of reproduction.

The museum's role in constructing knowledge and creating narratives for the visitor to interpret has been shown to shape the ways in which the miniature is perceived. The specific museum environment shapes this perception, as the miniature takes on the intended purpose prescribed by the exhibition curator and by the original collector of the object. In the case of the Dutch-Japanese miniatures discussed in the previous chapters, the museum mission is seen to shape the miniature's role directly despite the fact that these objects effectively belong to the same collection. Displayed in an ethnographic museum, they are used to illuminate Japanese culture, in a National Museum they illuminate Dutch-Japanese relations regarding the historical Dutch East India Company while an alternative display in a house museum sees these objects used to give background to a significant physician and collector of the 19th Century. The narrative changes depending on the museum's specific mission and focus, revealing the true power of the museum in shaping the viewer's interpretation of the object. The display strategy further emphasises this difference in intended purpose. The Sieboldhuis museum aims to inform the visitor about its prior occupant Philipp Franz von Siebold, and in doing so, uses the objects collected to tell his life story and illuminate his historic importance. Although the museum building has been renovated and modernised since Siebold's time, the display mirrors that of the past. The use of cabinets and shelving, the dim lighting, the abundance of objects on display all create the impression of a treasure hoard or a collection of curiosities. The lack of labels used in the display further articulate this message, that the display as a collective is there to create an impression of the man behind its assemblage, it is not intended that the visitor focus too closely on individual items but rather see the whole. Adding to this effect is the curator's choice on where to display such items and which to place next to each other. Although there is an attempt to categorise the objects according to type, material or function, it is often the case that objects of entirely different natures are placed alongside each other. The effect is that stated, that the objects create an impression on the whole.

Miniatures are also used to indicate structures, and industrial processes aiming to educate the viewer. Alternatively, the Japanese objects on display in the Volkenkunde Museum are used to educate the visitor about Japanese culture and history in general. While the objects reflect different collectors, they are used together to create a sense of the time and place. The display is entirely different to that of the Sieboldhuis museum, with the use of airy modern glass display units with accompanying screens. The screens allow the visitor to find extra information on the object of their choice and work to minimise clutter through the elimination of added labels and explanatory text alongside the display objects. Movement through the space is entirely left to the visitor, with display units set apart with no obvious sequence for viewing. This means the narrative is not focused on historical chronology but rather an overview of separate elements of a culture, elements which can be viewed in any order.

The miniatures are used to serve multiple functions, each standing for a different aspect of Japanese culture from the domestic everyday items, to industry in the mines to worship and the use of sacred objects. The intended audience is also suggested by the display, with the kitchen and mine miniatures positioned lower to the floor where children may be able to view them more easily. The miniature serves the function of educating and entertaining the visitor, young and old alike. Both of these functions are layered in themselves, with the visitor learning both about aspects of Japanese culture and Dutch Japanese relations in one. The entertainment derives from the fascination with altered scale, the aesthetic appeal and the awe for the skilled execution of the finished product. All in all, these miniatures are versatile and deliver a multitude of benefits for the museum collection, helping to explain a culture and stimulate the observer.

Often purpose-built specifically for museum display, miniatures intended for education can be among the few objects that do not lose their original function when placed on display. The opposite is in fact the case whereby these objects fulfil their purpose in the museum space. With the case studies in mind, it is clear that the miniature can be used to great effect in a minimalist display. Giving extra

attention to the object has the effect of inviting the viewer to visually explore the piece in full, and in doing so, promotes a full appreciation for the object both as an educational tool within the context of the display and as an aesthetically stimulating piece in its own right. These different functions can be seen as complementing forces, creating a layered experience for the museum visitor and allowing for a level of escapism into another world within the space. Serving as part of the museum narrative, the miniature can effectively create an informative three dimensional “picture”, providing a commentary on history while also being an object belonging to a period in history. It is for this reason that the miniature can be seen to enhance the visitor’s experience through their rich aesthetic appeal, skilled rendering and layered informative power.

While the practical elements of the miniature are evident in the museum space, there are undeniable power dynamics at play for the 19th Century Japanese miniature models on display in the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden.. The Volkenkunde, as an ethnographic museum, influences the viewer’s perception of the objects by presenting them primarily in the context of culture. The setting and museum mission are shown to influence the public’s understanding and interpretation of these objects, therefore lending great influence to the museum over the narrative and informative value. By contrast, a national museum setting may give focus to colonialism and history, while a house museum such as Sieboldhuis gives centre stage to the collector behind the works. Sourced in Japan and removed from this original location, the museum becomes the new home tying its artefacts into the narrative which best suits its mission. As well as the type of museum, the museum building and its style of exhibition also influence the viewer. The Volkenkunde is an immediately noticeable and monumental structure in Leiden. The formal, elegant interior with high ceilings further ensures that the visitor feels this monumentality upon entry. These features lend a certain authority to the institution, giving the implication that the displays within contain informatively accurate and authentic cultural artefacts. In other words, the common museum visitor is unlikely to question the constructed narrative or artefacts. The dim exhibition space with spot-lighting for the artefacts lends a certain theatricality to the display cases

and the minimal use of artefacts draws attention to the individuality of the items rather than giving an impression of the whole. The artefacts, including the miniature models, almost behave as actors on a stage performing different aspects of culture through their separate roles. The use of technology in the form of touch screens to display text facilitates the darkened space while also giving the museum the appeal of a modern and tech savvy environment. The inclusion of technology such as this can be associated with the current information age resulting from increased use and dependence on technology and the internet for the provision of information.

The time period to which these case studies belong also influences the interpretation of these objects, both at the time of collection and in the present day. The unique relationship between the Netherlands and Japan which existed in the early to mid 19th Century gave the Dutch officials a rare glimpse into an otherwise closed world. As the only western nation given trading rights, the objects accumulated represent Japanese culture as viewed through the Dutch lens. The jostling power between the Japanese hosts and Dutch visitors is evident through the latter's confinement to the artificial island of Dejima. The heavily restricted travel and constant supervision shows an exertion of authority as well as a mistrust of foreign visitors. These imposed rules were clearly intended to ensure the retention of control. The occasional breaking of these rules as documented regarding Siebold's maps and quite possibly Fisscher's miniature mineshaft signifies a level of revolt against such measures and a prioritisation of information gathering over respect of the Japanese nation.

While the historical background reveals its own power dynamics, and while the museum type and display style exert influence over interpretation, the original collector is chiefly responsible for providing their own personal perspective on Japanese culture. Very few individuals were afforded the privilege of travelling to Japan during this period of trade exclusivity and those who were selected belonged to a higher class of wealth, status and education. Being educated and in a position of influence due to social class allowed these officials to act as educators themselves, and to convey information to the public

as they saw fit. The collectors' status and first-hand experience coupled with the scarcity of Japanese artefacts allows for the representation to go unchallenged by its audience in Europe. Similar to how souvenirs are collected as personal keepsakes to consolidate the experience of another place, the objects collected by these Dutch officials are inextricably tied to their own personal experience and memory of Japan. Their understanding of Japanese culture was highly subjective and determined by their differing levels of exposure to the people, places and customs of Japan. This exposure was largely outside of their control, limiting their ability to experience the entirety of the country they resided in. The objects collected were decided solely by the officials and therefore predominantly based on their specific interests and educational background. Siebold as a physician by profession, for example, was interested in the medicine and medicinal practices or customs of the Japanese. He was also in a position to offer an education on western medicinal practice to the local population and acquired gifts for doing so. This profession influenced his choice on items to collect and transport back to Europe, therefore shaping the perceptions of Japan through his own lens. Especially subjective are the commissioned objects such as the kitchen and mine miniatures. Without any original function within Japanese culture, these objects instead filter the collectors' perceptions through the medium of a model. The kitchen miniature focuses on the paraphernalia of the Japanese kitchen rather than the realism of the kitchen space itself. This is indicated by the inclusion of two folding sides added to facilitate the safe transportation of the miniature. The prioritisation of accurate representation of craft reveals how Blomhoff had free reign to depict Japanese culture according to his own ideas on what was important, eliminating or sacrificing what he deemed unimportant. This can also be observed with the mine miniature which clearly emphasises the industrial processes involved in ore extraction in Japan. The inclusion of pulleys, ladders and miners all work towards this goal. The humans inhabiting this subterranean space as represented by plain figurines are reduced to mere tools in the process. Evidently, Fisscher was less concerned with the representation of humanity. The intention to represent the more human aspects of Japanese culture and every day life comes into being towards the end of this period of trade exclusivity. Siebold, originally interested in collecting the rare,

expensive and “special” objects of Japan, is seen to evolve in this way over his prolonged stay. The two shrine miniatures provide a useful comparison for the collection of rare and ornate versus every day and ordinary. This can be seen as an attempt to depict the true Japan; the one which is lived by the average Japanese person. Privilege, status, education and authority due to profession give the collectors the ability to represent Japanese culture in whatever manner they choose, and to an audience far removed from the subject matter and therefore in no position to question this representation or to believe anything other than what is shown.

The representation of culture through the medium of the miniature model offers further nuance to the discussion of power dynamics. The connection between miniatures and toys means that these objects become a focus point for a younger audience in the museum setting. The Volgenkunde acknowledges this through its positioning of the kitchen and mine miniatures in a display case lower to the floor. This has the effect of directing attention away from the serious and mature subject matter and placing it in the scope of childhood. The act of reducing scale can also have the effect of over-simplifying the subject, and in the case of the mine miniature, it can even depict a sanitised version of reality. The ability to depict Japanese craft and industry in miniature form, as seen in the kitchen and mine miniatures respectively, perhaps suggests the collectors’ desire to assert their superiority of comprehension through the successful and accurate replication of these Japanese objects and processes. The added intricacy involved when reducing scale and the provision of an overview of an entire system of an industrial process further suggests mastery and understanding over the subject matter. The power plays are more pronounced when objects are miniaturised, when craft is replicated and when the commissioner of the object is creating their own commentary on a different people and way of life.

The power dynamics at play with these miniature models largely relate to the power over interpretation of Japanese culture. This power lies with the Dutch nation offering the only western perspective on Japan at the time, with the individual collectors who selected or commissioned the miniatures according to their own personal interests and levels of understanding and exposure, and with

the Volkenkunde museum as an institution which shapes the cultural narrative. While the subject matter is of central importance to the exhibition, the manner of representation through the act of miniaturising a cultural setting can be seen to overly simplify and sanitise that which is depicted. The association between miniature models and playthings such as dollhouses further redirects focus from the subject matter to the realm of childhood and nostalgia. Miniatures which were not commissioned, such as the shrines, instead depict a cultural element removed from its original setting and adopting a new function imposed by the curators of the museum display. This changing of context and stripping of original intended function also detracts attention from the subject matter as the cultural significance is somewhat lost. The miniature instead becomes a historic artefact signifying the otherness of Japanese religious practice and worship. The reduction of scale also gives power to the observer as a god-like overseer of the miniature world before them. Significantly, if the miniaturisation and replication of ones own world signifies a certain mastery over this domain, as is the case with the Stettheimer and Oortman dollhouses, then the case studies discussed can be interpreted as an assertion of Dutch mastery and authoritative comprehension over 19th Century Japanese culture.

Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Credit Illustrations

Fig. 1: Scale model of Japanese kitchen, 1800-1823, wood, metal, 36 x 41 x 18,5 cm, Jan Cock Blomhoff, Volkenkunde Museum, Leiden, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/607144>

Fig. 2: Detail from miniature model of Japanese kitchen, 1800-1823, wood, metal, 36 x 41 x 18,5 cm, Jan Cock Blomhoff, Volkenkunde Museum, Leiden, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/607144>

Fig. 3: Miniature model of a gold or silver mine, 1800-1829, papier mache, wood, fabric, paint. 27 x 87 x 18 cm (open), Johannes Frederik van Overmeer Fisscher, Volkenkunde Museum, Leiden, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/607441>

Fig. 4: Detail from miniature model of a gold or silver mine, 1800-1829, papier mache, wood, fabric, paint. 27 x 87 x 18 cm (open), Johannes Frederik van Overmeer Fisscher, Volkenkunde Museum, Leiden, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/607441>

Fig. 5: Photo of miniature gold or silver mine exterior, Volkenkunde Museum, Georgina McMahon, 08/12/19

Fig. 6: Miniature pagoda shrine, Volkenkunde Museum, Leiden, 1800-1829, wood, gold, lacquer (likely collected by an assistant of Philipp Franz von Siebold), <https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/default.aspx?lang=en#/query/cda301f1-5f23-4423-bbdf-a38d71d82d30>

Fig. 7: Miniature Shinto shrine, Volkenkunde Museum, Leiden 1850-1877, wood and metal (likely collected by an assistant of Philipp Franz von Siebold), <https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/default.aspx?lang=en#/query/fdedbcde-cf74-4f3e-a459-683f24ebdc31>

Fig. 8: Photo of Miniature shrines in display case, Volkenkunde Museum, Georgina McMahon, 08/12/19

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