

On View | The Magical World of Steven and William Ladd

CULTURE, DESIGN | By BROOKE HODGE | JANUARY 31, 2014, 4:57 PM



A detail from inside the Ladd brothers' "Volcano" installation at the Mingei International Museum. *Andrew Zuckerman*

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FULL SCREEN

The magical, whimsical worlds created by the artists Steven and William Ladd are the subject of "Function and Fantasy," a new exhibition at the Mingei International Museum in San Diego. The brothers, who work out of a studio in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood, brought their individual practices together more than a decade ago, when Steven was designing clothes and William was making intricate beadwork. Soon William's beadwork found its way onto Steven's clothes, and a deep collaboration began to evolve. They formed an accessories company, incorporating work so complex that it takes them up to three years to complete a single handbag. Ideas for packaging led them to the tower installations that now lie at the heart of their artistic practice.



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The video "Building" sheds light on the artistic process of Steven and William Ladd.

Each tower is composed of a series of handmade fabric boxes of varying heights that contain smaller works — beaded forms and fields, textiles, small cast sculptures — that form fantastical landscapes. The exhibition at the Mingei contains 440 individual works: drawings, books and installations, as well as a series of charming short videos (narrated by Renée Price, the director of Manhattan's Neue Galerie) that illuminate the brothers' inspirations and creative process. In the video "Building," they describe "Join the Colony," a new work made especially for the exhibition. Nine boxes covered in lavender Ultrasuede form a tower; when each box is unstacked and opened, it reveals an infestation of tiny cast ants swarming over a beaded landscape. (The industrious insects have captivated the brothers since an incident during their childhood when they discovered a colony had infested their Lego box — and, it turned out, their entire house.) The presentation and opening of the boxes often takes the form of sensuous, ritualistic performances by the brothers, underscoring the suspense and surprise of discovering the miniature worlds inside. At least one such performance, to be announced, will take place at the Mingei during the show's four-month run.

The brothers also plan to conduct craft workshops with visitors and local schoolchildren during their visits to San Diego. And those on the East Coast will also have a chance to engage with the Ladds and their work when their exhibition "Mary Queen of the Universe" (the name of their childhood school in St. Louis) opens at the Parrish Museum in Water Mill, N.Y., on Oct. 25.

"Function and Fantasy — Steven and William Ladd" is on view at the Mingei International Museum through June 1; mingei.org.

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