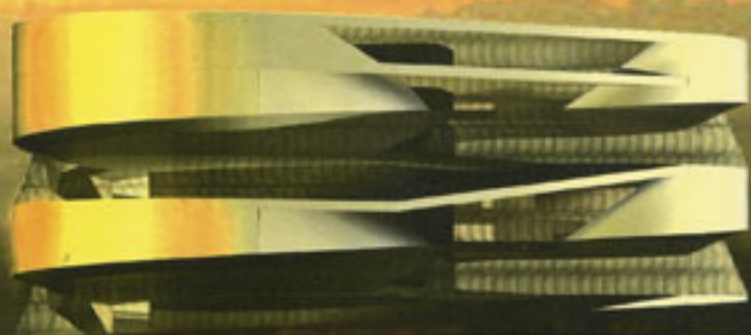


# MUSEUM D · E · S · I · G · N

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Max-Gerrit von Pein  
Director  
DaimlerChrysler Heritage





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## MODEL-MAKING FOR MUSEUMS: A Conversation with Elizabeth Koval-Maffeo



Elizabeth Koval Maffeo

MD. In this era of shrinking budgets and diminishing grants, why do you think museums still go for the classical scale models to educate?

EKM. It is our responsibility as a community and educators of art and natural sciences to invest in our future generations. The museum and the longevity of its exhibits are important in teaching the youth, but unfortunately the quality of the exhibit is often sacrificed due to budget constraints. A quality model is reliable. It invites the visitor to examine all angles of a specimen that one would not normally have the opportunity to see unless the specimen was deceased and preserved. Although taxidermy specimens (e.g., insects, spiders, and amphibians) may be more cost effective to display, disintegration of the preserved organic specimen may occur over time and the investment is lost. Models are good investments when you look at the big picture.



Volunteer work: Male tarantula's created for IWM



Sculpting Male Tarantula



Water boatman on a blade of grass to the right.

MD. With computer animation and hypermedia at fingertips, what gives the toe-hold to scale models?

EKM. Computer animation and hypermedia do not provide kinesthetic learning for the visitor.

Until computers produce holographic imagery for museum exhibits, scale and life size models are the best representation of 3D.

MD. Describe to our readers what might be a typical process from stern to ship of conceiving, constructing and commissioning a model?

EKM. There is a mission to achieve when making a model. Knowledge and understanding is the key. First, you have to believe. Be excited about the task that you are going to undertake. Second, educate. Educate yourself with the subject's background whether it be biology, botany,



or historical culture. Third, know the story. Ask yourself, "What is the purpose for creating the model and why does it need to be told?" Keeping these things in mind will arm one with the confidence and the necessary tools to put life into this inanimate object. These elements will transfer to the visitor on some subconscious level. Without these, the foundation of any project would be wanting.

Technically, the process of creating a model begins with gathering references. The level of difficulty is revealed through the content of the story and the purpose for creating it. Consider the following: How close will it be seen by the visitor? Is it touchable or will it be protected behind plexi-glass? Will it be exposed to UV rays, moisture, and humidity? Will it be submerged underwater and exposed to live animals? These are all important questions that will protect the longevity of the model and its organic, environmental surroundings. If the model is complicated, usually a little research and development (R&D) is done. R&D consists of problem solving and testing of material compatibilities. The next step involves prototyping and production. Creating a prototype or a portion of the model is necessary for client approval in order to continue further on the project. Once approved, production goes underway. Production activity can range from a single constructed unit to a mass undertaking of multiple components to create one overall model. The final stage of making and commissioning a model involves the shipping and installing of deliverables to the client. Packing the model must be done with care and the shipping crate or box must be durable. Installation of the model and how it relates to its surroundings should have been decided toward the beginning of the construction of the model. This reinforces the point made earlier that the way the model is displayed at its final destination should be factored into the model making method.

MD. What is your area of specialization and its unique attributes?

EKM. For about 7 years now, I have been creating scientifically accurate plant life and insect models for natural science museums. The challenge of this specialization is the attention to detail and working in a micro level. The reward is in seeing those attributes produce a piece that is museum worthy.

Top photo: Lindsay Wildlife Museum

Middle photo: "Keeping It Wild" exhibit 2

Bottom photo: This panel holds the diorama that I made the insects for.

Samurai sculpture  
"Makenai"  
in progress.



MD. What are some of the most ambitious assignments you've under-taken?

EKM. I have had the joy and challenge of assignments that have ranged from underwater feathery specimens to exotic and carnivorous plant life, all the way down to tiny insect appendages. Most recently, however, I was challenged to sculpt (in small scale) a 16th century samurai armor for a bronze statue.





Green Damselfly Dragonfly model

MD. What kind of training goes into honing one's skills of perception and execution?

EKM. I believe training starts with knowing what's within you—take an inventory of your own learning style. Ask yourself which modality helps you absorb information more effectively? The three basic modality styles to process information to memory are 1) visual (learning by seeing), 2) auditory (learning by hearing), and 3) kinesthetic (learning by doing). You can be a little of each one of these processes but your strongest method will increase your confidence in processing and executing the task at hand. Personally, my dominant learning style is visual and then kinesthetic.

Knowing the tools and materials of the trade is also important. Additionally, allow the possibility that a task can be created in various methods. I have found myself recreating an assignment a month to as far as a year later and not repeating the method originally used. New products and materials are constantly being invented as older reliable products become discontinued—its planned obsolescence at its finest! Each project that you encounter—whether it be a solo or group collaboration—will give you the experience to strengthen your personal skills. Like my father would say, "Practice makes perfect".



Take-A-Part Flower: Educational model

All photo credits: Elizabeth Koval-Malleo

MD. Are their areas in this practice, that more curator's need to tap into while enhancing the educational reach for diverse audiences?

EKM. In life there is always constant change—evolution of technology, new findings of the natural sciences, and pop culture, etc. – influence growth. The curator needs to keep their eyes and ears constantly opened to the world changing around them. In other words, he or she should maintain a constant check on the pulse of their patrons. "Thinking outside the box" is a popular term used in many professions. When taking that leap outside "the box", make sure that the integrity of the museum and its unique style is not compromised. Besides finding exciting new ways to create educational exhibits through media interest, the practice of maintaining an existing exhibit is equally important. Depending on the quality of exhibit elements (e.g., fossils, bones, taxidermy, models, murals, display cases, ground roll, graphic panels, etc.), the upkeep through routine inspection and looking for new methods to prepare and repair objects are a curator's responsibilities.

