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Play time

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UPCOMING EVENTS

PLAY TIME



Although Hong Kong was once the centre of the world's toy manufacturing industry, the city does not have a museum honouring these icons of childhood. But that will soon change, writes **DAISY ZHONG**.

MOST OF THE WORLD'S major cities have toy museums, but not Hong Kong. But the gap will be filled, at least temporarily, on December 16th, when Toys Paradise opens.

"This will be the first-ever toy exhibition in Hong Kong with a cultural and historical perspective," says C. K. Yeung, organiser of Toys Paradise, a three-month exhibition showcasing 60 years of the city's toy culture at the HKDI.

"Hong Kong has been the world's 'Toy Town' for the past six decades, and this has been vital to its economy," says the toy guru, who worked in the industry here for 50 years and watched it grow from its primitive origins to its current high-tech incarnation.

The exhibition will feature more than 1,000 pieces made in Hong Kong, along with toys created by artists and students. Many of them have fascinating stories to tell about the history of toys, including three pre-war metal toys and a couple of items from the late Qing Dynasty. Most items in the exhibition were provided by Yeung's personal connections, including Joel Chung, an assiduous private collector of Hong Kong toys.

Yet the exhibition is not just about the frivolous enjoyment of a few entertaining playthings. Yeung stresses that toys are intimately related to transformations in society.

"Toys are important, ever-evolving embodiments of creativity that combine elements of culture and design," he says. "They tell a profound story about the era in which they were made."

The exhibition will also hold workshops for students from secondary schools and colleges, who will be invited to take part in designing and producing toys from paper, wood and metal. The most creative of these will win places in the exhibition. Yeung says guided school and public tours, as well as seminars, will be arranged to enrich the exhibition with long-term educational value.

"Toys Paradise is not just about creating something entertaining," says Yeung. "We also want to educate, enlighten, and inspire."

Yeung hopes the event will spark off an interest in creativity and toy design in young students, some of whom may turn out to be important members of the local pool of inventors. "Creativity is now the key element for raising the Hong Kong toy industry to a higher level. To become more competitive, Hong Kong toy companies must further enhance their creativity in terms of design and high technology."

Yeung says he will also plan a regional touring exhibition after Toys Paradise closes. Next year has been designated "Hong Kong Design Year", an initiative supported by the SAR government; so Yeung's dream of establishing Hong Kong's first toy museum seems to be moving closer to a reality. "I have always had a true fascination for toys, from my childhood until now. They've basically been my whole life. I never did nor will I depart from that." ©

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