Carmen Lozar, Illinois Wesleyan University, interviewed by Laura Kennedy, WGLT
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A new exhibit at the Illinois Wesleyan University art galleries highlights a collection of intricately carved model ships. WGLT's Laura Kennedy hoisted anchor for this report...

Laura Kennedy: “Some of the most beautiful ships in maritime history never went anywhere near the water. They’re models, detailed scale replicas of their bigger cousin scallions, men of war, aircraft carriers, and they can also be considered works of art,” says Carmen Lozar, Director of the Merwin and Wakeley Galleries at Illinois Wesleyan in Bloomington. The summer exhibit “The Art of the Sea” features selections from the National Museum of Ship Models and Sea History, located in the landlocked community of Sadorus, Illinois. The museum was created by Lozar’s father, Charles, who after collecting model ships for over fifty years, simply ran out of room in his garage. Carmen Lozar says it was her father’s childhood love of transportation that began his collection.

Carmen Lozar: And I think he loves this idea of scale ship models and if you look at something and you can kind of stare at it, you can kind of fall into it and it takes you somewhere.

Laura Kennedy: Why, originally, were these models created?

Carmen Lozar: Some people today just make them as a pastime and a hobby and of course there’s those people. There’s other people—this model here, which is made of matchsticks, was—is actually made in the—I think it’s the Kentucky Prison System. It’s a 17th century three-decker English hull and the entire thing is made of matchsticks, so in this case, someone was using this is the prison system as a means probably to spend their time and to be creative. Now that was not too long ago that this piece was created.

Laura Kennedy: About 1970.

Carmen Lozar: Yep, 1970, but other pieces were really created for people who were—for kings, if you were going to sail across the sea and you wanted to kind of make a proposal, “Look I need this ship to take this voyage,” they would make a scale ship model and show it to the king and the king would, say, you know, “Yes, we can go ahead and build this.” There were also used—

Laura Kennedy: Instead of blueprints.

Carmen Lozar: Yes, instead of blueprints and, absolutely, that is why it’s so important that they are to scale because basically these—they were blown up. They were also made to bless voyages. They were made to—as a way to ensure that the voyage went well—was to have this small kind of model. Yeah, so there’s lots of reasons. I think today it’s a hobbyist thing. Also sailors made a lot of ships. There’s a ship in the foyer

that's made by a sailor and that was also a way that they, I think, passed time on the boats.

Laura Kennedy: Prisoners of war would do it too. They would use bits of wood and bone even.

Carmen Lozar: Yes, bone, and there is a small diorama over here and it's Chinese and it is made of the tiniest, tiny bits of bone and ivory. It was purchased a long time ago. It's—the detail on it is just amazing. That was put together I think like right after Nixon opened up to trade with China. This piece was—my father found in San Francisco. You know, whittling and things like that, I think were a way to pass the time when you're on the ocean.

[Music]

Laura Kennedy: "Some of the model ships were constructed to use in films. It's easy to imagine a tiny aeroflin as the seahawk, strutting the deck of one of the clipper replicas. The serendipitous manner in which the former film props made it into Charles Lozar's collection is certainly a happy ending," says Carmen Lozar.

Carmen Lozar: When my father lived in California, they used to go to Universal Studios and Universal Studios had all these wonderful ship models sitting in the lot and eventually my father said, you know, "I'm really interested," and basically they just—they were sitting out in the rain and they just wanted to move them, so in the museum in Sadorus there's *Tugboat Annie*, there's *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, there's all these really famous boats and the reason they used scale ship models in these movies was because you can't—it's very hard to shrink waves down, so you needed these large scale boats to be floating on the screen in these waves kind of to catch this idea of this really happening. It's very hard to do it digitally. Still today they're creating really incredible model ships as, you know, designs for cruise ships, which is cruise ship design over here and these—

Laura Kennedy: Norwegian Sea.

Carmen Lozar: Norwegian Sea. They're made in Vietnam, which is—and this I think he purchased this ship just a couple years ago, these are coming from Vietnam today, which is—and they're really kind of exquisite and interesting.

Laura Kennedy: So we're still making the model ships to demonstrate what we intend to make in real size.

Carmen Lozar: Yes, absolutely, absolutely.

Laura Kennedy: Are these still important do you think?

Carmen Lozar: Absolutely because I think they're—they lend a sense of wonder to our lives like, you know, my dad always said it's a way that you can tell the world the history of the world and it's true. This is how people used to get around, this is how people discovered new worlds, and this is the—one of the first means of transportation. And besides that, aesthetically, I think they're just really joyful, wonderful things—

Laura Kennedy: You have other items here too. I love this wheel!

Carmen Lozar: Oh yes!

[Both laugh]

Carmen Lozar: Oh right, so this wheel, my father insisted we put this big ship's wheel, steering wheel, in here and the reason is that he wanted to make sure—he was hoping that there would be children because children usually love model ships and he thought they could expend a lot of energy turning this wheel rather than trying to get their fingers onto the ships, so—[laughs]

Laura Kennedy: So it's okay to touch?

Carmen Lozar: Yeah, absolutely. Come and spin the wheel.

Laura Kennedy: That's Carmen Lozar, Director of the Art Galleries at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington. She says, "Feel free to get up close to examine the fine work on the model ships but please excuse the dust. The complicated and delicate rigging makes cleaning the ships a tricky task." I'm Laura Kennedy, WGLT News.