

Ligorano/Reese



The World Through a Flurry of Snow

By KATE MURPHY
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THE holiday windows of the flagship Saks Fifth Avenue in New York always prompt sidewalk pileups. But this year the window with the largest crowd snapping cellphone pictures is the one containing 150 snow globes.

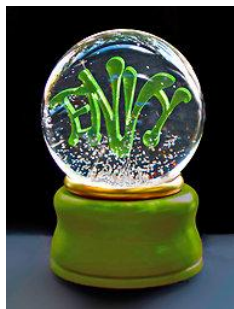


Henri Bendel's Globe

“We always have a general idea of which holiday window will be most successful and get the best response,” said Harry Cunningham, the store’s senior vice president for design and visual merchandising. “I personally did not expect the snow globes to be as big a hit.”

Snow globes, which first appeared at the 1878 Paris Exposition Universelle, and have long been a staple of souvenir shops, have lately evolved into something more fashionable, intricate and expensive. Retail stores, fashion designers, corporations, movie studios and visual artists are increasingly creating signature globes, and not just for the holidays.

Eric Hirsh, owner of Global Design and Gifts, a snow globe manufacturer in Chicago, whose past customers include department stores and clothing designers, said his business has doubled in the last year, mostly due to corporate sales. “I think when people are looking at their promotional budget, they want something different that people aren’t going to throw away like a pen, cap or clock,” he said. “People are going to keep a snow globe on their desk and pick it up while they’re on the phone and shake it.”



A Deadly Sin by Ligorano/Reese

Vogue’s creative director, Grace Coddington, is one of those people. The snow globe in her office was given to her a few years ago by the Japanese fashion label Comme des Garçons and has two little bears, one black and one white, in a tinsel snowstorm. It’s probably worth quite a bit: Louis Vuitton snow globes given free as gifts to V.I.P. customers last year now list for as much as \$2,299 on the luxury auction Web site Malleries.com. On Pinterest, one can find limited-edition snow globes created by Jean Paul Gaultier (filled with perfume), Lanvin, Chanel and Karl Lagerfeld. “Fashion designers seem to be using them quite a bit for advertising,” said Deb Rouse, a lawyer in Houston who has 3,000 snow globes — also known as snowdomes, waterballs and snow shakers — that she began collecting as a joke to fill the empty bookshelves in her first apartment after college.

Collectors reliably snap up the annual holiday snow globes produced by department stores like Neiman Marcus, Macy’s and Bloomingdale’s. “My husband has a standing order at Neiman Marcus to get the Christmas snow dome every year,” Ms. Rouse said. But in recent years these globes have become more elaborate and expensive, like the 2012 Deck the Halls musical snow globe at Henri Bendel (\$68), which, like its 2011 globe, has an unusual elongated shape like a Victorian terrarium. Stores like Anthropologie and West Elm have also come up with their own chic versions.

And earlier this year, the Transportation Safety Administration removed snow globes from its list of banned items in carry-on luggage. “It is something people tend to buy when they go somewhere,” said David Castelveter, a T.S.A. spokesman, like Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla., where collectible snow globes cost as much as \$150, as well as less obvious destinations like Siberia.

Indeed, the 8,000 globes in the actor Corbin Bernsen's collection include some from obscure locales as well as from JetBlue and Southwest. "It's advertising but also fun pop art," he said.

Some artists have created somewhat darker snow globes. The creative team of Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese sell ones with profane words floating inside and a Seven Deadly Sins series, each costing \$125. And Walter Martin and Paloma Muñoz have collaborated on several globes depicting surreal snowy scenes of mayhem and isolation, for which collectors pay \$10,000 each.

"It's the relationship with a miniature world with yourself as voyeur and omnipotent being looking down at this scene and you can make it snow," said Mr. Martin, explaining snow globes' appeal. "People just love that feeling, and department stores and designers know that it's the perfect way to lure and seduce."