

[Snow Globes: From Art to Kitsch](#)

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Snow globes are childhood's wintery dreamlands, so powerful an allegory that they appear in films, television series, and commercials to carry spectators into a holiday happily-ever-after. During the holiday season, should a snow globe not be readily available from a nearby toy chest or shelf, you can download a snowglobe app for both iPhone and Android, transforming your quotidian emails and social media sites. The ongoing popularity of these iconic pop culture objects, now transformed to the digital realm, gives pause to ask: why snow globes? Early in their history (despite their contested origin story), snow globes were considered works of art, and some still are. While they continue to be popular collectibles, snow globes have moved into the realm of kitsch and seem unlikely to transcend it.

There is something strangely magical about a world in which there are competing origin stories for something as mundane as the snow globe. In the Austrian version of the story, snow globes have some national pride and cultural connection. They represent the place. Parisians might tell a different story. And unsurprisingly, it was an American who patented the design.

Who owns the largest collection of snow globes is also contested. The Guinness Book of World Records, which purports expertise in these matter, supports the claim of Wendy Suen of Shanghai, China, who has collected 4,059 snow globes. Suen's status was confirmed in 2016, and Guinness notes that her collection grew significantly from her original world record claim of 904 snow globes in 2005. Actor Corbin Bernsen posted a message on the Guinness website, claiming his collection includes over 8,000 snow globes, almost doubling Suen's.

In a 2013 interview with Los Angeles Magazine, Bernsen explained that he began collecting snow globes while traveling to promote the television series L.A. Law in the 1980s. "I picked up a few in various towns as souvenirs, like one that said Welcome to St. Louis," he says. "I had about 25 in a display case, and they looked like pop art. I was in the zone." The "zone" led Bernsen to purchase entire collections from others while also continuing to hand-pick snow globes that appealed to him individually.

Nearly a year following Bernsen's comment on the Guinness site, collector Andy Zito alerted Guinness to his record-breaking collection of more than 11,500 snow globes, yet the Records Team apparently has not been out to size up Zito's collection.

Because they easily render placid winter scenes, snow globes have become a mainstay of Christmas decor. What is serene is not always secure, as a charity shop in Bournemouth, England revealed on Christmas Day 2014. A fire in the store's display window was apparently caused by sunlight refracting through a snow globe that then set fire to other items in the display.

The Bournemouth snow globe became an object of transformation, where many snow globes

tend to depict traditional scenes and places, often rendering a sense of nostalgia and remembrance in the process. For decades, tourist attractions and gift shops have capitalized on the sense of place that snow globes reify: the visitor takes home an idyllic, eternal image of the place they have seen, or simply dream of seeing.