

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

SAMPANAS

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These pieces are sampan miniatures, carved in natural material, very polished fruit stone in this case, over painted wood supports and a base of red felt. It is a miniaturisation handcraft work, from the Far East, executed in great detail and precision.

In both miniatures, we can observe, beyond the particular boat lines, several human forms and vegetal motives. In one of the boats, it is possible to count forty-seven miniscule human forms.

The word “sampan” refers to a craft that can present some structural variations but it is from Chinese origin and has a relatively flat bottom. Some include small on board shelters and are used for temporary or permanent living aboard and for transportation and fishing in coastal waters or rivers, being unable to navigate in the open seas. They are usually propelled by oars or outboard engines and still very common in the South-western Asia, in countries like Vietnam, Malaysia or Indonesia.

The work of fruit stone miniature carving is well known, particularly at China, in olive pit for example and it is faced as an art, the Nano sculpture, of great difficulty, that has produced fantastic and intricate pieces, being the boats a common subject.