

You Think Your Model Airplane Collection is Big? The Smithsonian Has More Than 4,000

Tiny treasures at the National Air and Space Museum

Air Space Magazine

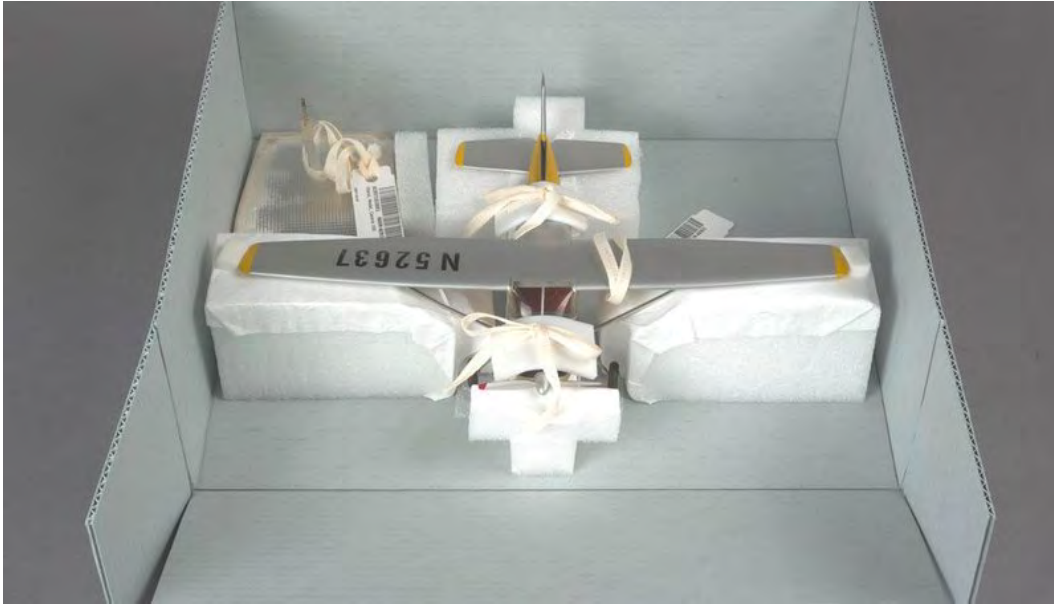
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One of the Museum's most popular models, this replica of the Johnson Monoplane was built in 1959 by Julius and Harry Johnson—who designed and built the original aircraft in 1910. (NASM/Eric Long)

Among the historic items in the collection of the National Air and Space Museum are thousands of model aircraft—4,614 to be exact—that help explain the history of flight. The models aren't currently on public display, but until recently some 640 of them were located in the Museum's third floor office space, where staff could see gems like the Felixstowe F.5L (a British flying boat from World War I) or solid wood replicas of every variant of the Boeing B-17. The Museum also holds one of the world's largest surviving collections of World War II plastic recognition models, and promotional airline models like a Douglas DC-6 (donated by United Airlines) and a Boeing 707-320 (donated by Pan American).

Because the Museum on the Mall in Washington D.C. is undergoing revitalization, the models are being packed carefully for a move to the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in northern Virginia. Each item is surveyed by two teams: one to document, photograph, and write a description of the model, including the materials it is made of and whether it needs immediate conservation treatment. The second team then rehouses each model in a custom box that is carefully secured into a shipping container.



More than 3,000 models that used to be stored at the Museum's Paul E. Garber Facility in Maryland have already been moved. The team has until December to package the remaining 640 at the Mall location. Here, a Cessna 180 model, 1/36 scale, is neatly packed away. (Jason Smith/NASM)

The models are extremely varied, says Samantha Snell, who coordinates the team in charge of the move. The collection includes everything from models built for wind tunnel tests to those built purely for pleasure. "There are plastic models, wood, and some that are extremely fragile that have fabric or paper as part of their components," she adds.

We asked Christopher Moore, who curates the model collection, to select a few of his favorites:



"I have always been fascinated with R/C helicopters," says Christopher Moore, who curates the Museum's aeromodel collection. "This is the first successful radio-controlled model helicopter to fly in the U.S. and the first torque-reaction (motor mounted on top of the rotor) model helicopter to fly anywhere." David Gray's model was demonstrated publicly for the first time in 1970. The Museum acquired the model in 1979. It is powered by an O.S. Max .40 engine mounted on top of the main rotor. (NASM/Eric Long)



"This North American B-25H Mitchell is perhaps one of the most realistic in the collection," says Moore. "It has retractable landing gear, operating bomb-bay doors and cowl flaps, a droppable bomb, and a firing cannon, among other details. The fact that it is a U-control flying model only makes it more amazing." Built by William F. Harney between 1951 and 1962, it was donated in 1972. Scale is 1/18. (NASM/Eric Long)



"This Grumman TBF-1C model is amazingly detailed," says Moore. "The wings fold, just as on the full-size aircraft. The model is so impressive that its builder was contracted to make a similar model for President George H.W. Bush, who flew Avengers during World War II." Master modeler Arlo Schroeder built the bomber from plastic, vacuum-formed over wood molds. The Museum acquired the model in 1989. Scale 1/16. (NASM/Eric Long)



"This is a large-scale model of one of my favorite aircraft, the Fokker Triplane," says Moore. "Its detailed interior is visible through a clear covering." The 1/6-scale model was built by Paul and Christopher Blymyer, circa 2006. (NASM/Eric Long)



The Museum acquired the 1/10-scale aluminum and fabric model of the Johnson brothers' monoplane from the Johnson family in 1960. The actual monoplane flew from 1911 to 1913. (NASM/Eric Long)