

Miffy Fountain

A PUBLIC ARTWORK BY TOM SACHS



Tom Sachs (American, b. 1966); **Miffy Fountain** 2007

Painted bronze. H. 108 x W. 48 x D. 48 inches; H. 9 x W. 4 x D. 4 feet

Base: H. 1.2 x W. 8 x D. 8 feet; Edition #2 of 5; cast in 2008

Gift in Memory of Melva Bucksbaum from her daughter Mary Bucksbaum Scanlan, and sons Gene Bucksbaum and Glenn Bucksbaum; Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation Collection, 2018.2 / Photo: Ben Easter

Miffy Fountain is located on the north side of Locust Street between 10th & 12th Streets near the Central Library in Western Gateway Park, Des Moines.

GPS Coordinates: 41°35'08.5"N / 93°37'53.5"W

ABOUT MIFFY

Miffy is a little bunny who is the main character in a series of children's books that were first published in 1955 by Dutch author and illustrator Dick Bruna. Since then, Miffy has been marketed worldwide in millions of products such as toys, colored pencils, nightlights, puzzles, games, cups, and clocks.

ABOUT THE WORK OF ART

Tom Sachs is an American artist who comments on our contemporary commercial culture, often through sculptures that incorporate actual objects found in everyday life. For his *Miffy Fountain*, he uses the globally-recognized children's-book character Miffy, enlarged to a monumental size and cast in the noble heavy material of bronze. This contrast with her usual representation in bright, flat colors on paper or as a

small plastic object, elevates the little Miffy into the material and proportional realm of grand art historical monuments. Sachs created *Miffy Fountain* by gluing together light-weight pieces of foamcore, which were then cast in bronze and painted white. Unlike the common mechanically mass-produced variations of Miffy characterized by their identical, flawless and impersonal surfaces, Sachs's version, reveals the imperfections of the artist's hand. Elements like the uneven seams between pieces of foamcore and the dried drips of paint and glue represent the artist's way of returning to an artisanal mode of production, all the while reminding us, that "flaws are human."

Another unusual aspect of *Miffy Fountain* are the tears springing from her eyes and falling into a pool around her feet. This never-ending trickle of tears makes us wonder immediately: why is Miffy crying? "Miffy is crying," Sachs explains quite simply, "because she is sad."

Just as he chose to reveal his process in creating Miffy and not pretend that everything was perfect, now Sachs reminds us that being human sometimes means that we are unhappy, so unhappy that we weep. No one can be happy all of the time, not even children — perhaps especially children. Tears are part of childhood and, though adults usually cry less than children, tears remain in our lives from time to time. Sachs's sculpture allows us to recognize the sadness we sometimes feel. It also arouses our sympathy for those others who weep, even when we do not know exactly why, as we do not know for sure why Miffy is sad.

Discussion of *Miffy Fountain* by Lea Rosson DeLong, based in part on an interview with Tom Sachs, 21 November 2018.

Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation's mission is to place art in public spaces through public and private collaborations like *Miffy Fountain* and *Temple Chess & Poetry Garden*.

The Foundation engages, inspires, and enriches the lives of citizens and visitors in our community. It is recognized for increasing cultural awareness by establishing a world-class destination for public art.



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