LEGO ENTHUSIAST DANIEL VERMEIR ON HIS SCALE MODEL OF THE PRINCESS ELISABETH ANTARCTICA STATION



© Daniel Vermeir

To celebrate the opening of the exhibit "To the Antarctic: Belgica's Polar Pioneers", Antwerp resident and LEGO enthusiast Daniel Vermeir built an amazing scale model of the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica, the world's first and to date only zero-emission polar research station.

The exhibition, which looks at Belgium's history of exploration and research in Antarctica from the Belgica ship's first overwintering expedition in 1897-99 to the present day, features information about the groundbreaking polar station and the scientific research projects that take place there every austral summer. The exhibition will be open to the public until November 3rd.

Mr Vermeir was happy to answer some questions about the scale model, which is currently on display in the MAS Museum's gift shop, MASshop.

This is a very impressive piece of work. How long did it take to build? How many lego bricks did you use?

The model consists of about 6000 bricks. I estimate that the construction took around 70 hours, although I often underestimate how long it takes!

How big is the model? To what scale has it been built?

The model is in LEGO minifigure scale, which is somewhere between 1/40 and 1/43. It measures 75x75cm including the “snow” plate on which the station has been built.

What photos or images did you use as a reference for building the model of the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica?

I used images of the station on the IPF website, as well as cross-sections of the station that can be found online in PDFs and in books.

Was this on your own initiative or was there a specific reason why you decided to build a scale replica of the station? What inspired you?

The idea came to me in April when I was talking to Wim, the manager of the MASshop, the gift shop to the MAS Museum in Antwerp.

Wim knows about my interest in LEGOs and said that it would be nice to have a scale LEGO model for the upcoming exhibition, either the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica station or the Belgica ship. I told him that I would see what I could do.

What challenges did you encounter when building the scale replica of the station?

The time I had available was the most difficult thing about building the replica of the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica. Usually I first take a few months to let ideas mature. But since I only had two months to build it before the opening of the exhibition in June, I chose to only do a model of the outside of the station and not worry about building its interior. If I had had more time, it might have been possible to do the inside as well.

The unique octagon shape of the station did not make it easy, either. LEGO tends to think in squares.

Were there any rare LEGO pieces that you needed to make the model?

The most unique blocks are the solar panels. There are about 320 in total on the model!

Have you done any similar projects?

I’ve been building scale replicas with LEGO bricks for about ten years. The Princess Elisabeth Antarctica station is not my first work, although in terms of construction style it’s not what I typically build. Normally I prefer building mediaeval structures like castles, Tudor houses, ruins, and so on.

In addition to making a scale replica of Het Steen mediaeval fortress in Antwerp, I’ve also done a zoo project, a skyline of the City of Antwerp, and much more.

I’ve put most of my creations on my Instagram page.

Did you use any special software from LEGO to design the model of the station?

Indeed, there's software to help you make LEGO models, but I didn't use it to build the replica of the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica. Making a digital version of a LEGO building takes time, which I didn't have for the station project.

When I made a LEGO replica of Het Steen, I first made it digitally to get a better idea of ??the number of bricks I would need and how much it would cost. Of course, it takes time to make a digital version of the building. I started working on a digital version of Het Steen at the beginning of 2021, and I finished building the LEGO replica a few months ago.

Do you think LEGO might one day be interested in releasing a Princess Elisabeth Antarctica set for the general public to purchase?

LEGO usually takes two years to bring a building set to market, from design to final product. Given the international nature of the station, I would suspect that LEGO might be interested in making a Princess Elisabeth Antarctica set. Of course, everything depends on whether they would see good revenue from releasing one.

What will happen to the replica of the station once the exhibition is over? Will you take it home, or will it be displayed elsewhere?

Probably I'll take it home afterwards, and perhaps display it at a few LEGO fairs. In the meantime, I can add even more details or even add an interior.

Next year in September perhaps I could display it at the Skærbæk Fan Weekend in Denmark, so the model can be displayed to an international audience.

Afterwards, the model will be taken apart so the bricks can be reused in other LEGO projects of mine.