gta papers: Toys

Deadline: Nov 16, 2026

Maria Novas

Architectural or spatial toys are anything but innocent entertainment items. Toys occupy a central role in the development of social behaviors and intellectual capacities. From abstract construction systems to figurative items, they embody gendered, racialized, and colonial biases that influence cultural imaginaries and social expectations across generations to come. Yet, within architectural and urban design history, toys have often appeared only as anecdotal objects in shaping the vocations of canonized architects. Limited attention has been given to their pedagogical value, the importance of play as a means of cultivating spatial imagination, the creation of alternative worlds, or the violence that toys can normalize.

Although material objects are not essential to play, they facilitate and stimulate how children interpret, imagine, and learn to construct the world around them. Educational aims vary according to intended audiences. While some toys foster construction and creative agency, others have cultivated warfare among boys or socialized girls into domestic, care, or reproductive labor. At the same time, the contributions of countless anonymized or non-acknowledged toy designers, many of them architects and many of them women, have been overshadowed by the commercial success of corporate brands under which their creations were marketed.

Architectural toys often rely on scale and multiple systems of representation, including images, drawings, plans, and physical or virtual maquettes, which parallel the representational tools of architectural practice itself. Toys are often based on real spaces, such as houses, stores, or military architectures, that stereotype and simplify the complexity of reality into reductive modes of representation. Dollhouses in particular have historically privileged neo-traditional, bourgeois, and even colonial aesthetics, while reinforcing class-based spatial hierarchies between spaces of service and spaces of privilege and ideals, not only of architectural style but also of domestic spatial organization and social life.

This issue of gta papers seeks to draw historical and theoretical attention to a frequently overlooked subject that is central in shaping people’s understandings of space, society, identity, and architectural imagination. We invite intersectional critical examinations of how architectural toys are designed, produced, and marketed to reveal the cultural and political values through which different generations have learned to imagine and value space. We encourage contributions representing diverse historical periods and pluriversal geographies. Proposals might explore paradoxes of how architects have engaged with spatial toys, the overlooked contributions of women designers, or the material and symbolic histories of particular toys and their role in shaping gendered, class-based and colonial forms of spatial learning. Proposals might also examine how architectural styles, social ideals, and aesthetic values are transmitted. Equally welcome are

studies and image-based contributions that explore historical and contemporary experiments employing architectural toys to ultimately challenge the prescribed social orders and play cultures and encourage alternative architectural and urban futures.

Submissions
Please send proposals of 300 words (including title, author's name(s) and sample images if applicable) in a single .docx file to academic.editor@gta.arch.ethz.ch (María Novas) by November 16, 2026, saved by the primary author's surname(s). We welcome proposals for short (2500-word) or long (5500-word) articles, photo essays, and image-based archival submissions. State your preferred format and the number of images that you hope to include. Note that accepted contributions must submitted in full by April 5, 2027. All articles will be peer-reviewed, revised and professionally copyedited before publication.

Reference:
CFP: gta papers: Toys. In: ArtHist.net, Oct 1, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026),
<https://arthist.net/archive/54500>.