

Bandai Master Grade 1/100
RX-75 Guntank
RX-78-2 Gundam
RX-77-2 Guncannon



THE RESCUE

BUILDING MY FIRST GUNDAM DIORAMA

BY MINH THAI



INTRODUCTION

Two and a half years ago, a good friend of mine kept posting photos of his Gundam model builds on Facebook. I never thought that I would follow him into this hobby, but here I am writing about it.

I got my first Gundam model kit from a certain hobby store that gives 40 percent off their models every other week. This made the hobby very addicting and my wallet lighter every time I visited the store.

My first Gundam build had all sorts of flaws and imperfections that I didn't know. I

thought my Gundam model was as cool as a robot can be and I displayed it in my cabinet proudly! But just like a noob (beginner), I did everything wrong: I left nub marks, seam lines, gaps, and glue marks. I also used stickers that came with the kit to decorate the armor surfaces instead of using water-slide decals. If you can name a mistake, I have made it in one way or another.

As time went by with more kits I built, I learned new techniques and applied them to the next model. I've learned to correct those earlier flaws, started to use an airbrush to paint my Gundam models, and started to enter a few small local competitions.





So what does all this have to do with me building a diorama you might ask? Well, I have a dream of going to Japan for the Gundam Builder World Cup (GBWC) one day. I entered the local 2025 GBWC this past summer with a beautifully painted Master Grade ZAKU II model and lost. Although I won an award for best painted model, I couldn't understand why I didn't even rank in 3rd place. Then I noticed the models that placed 1st, 2nd, and 3rd were built with a base or some type of small diorama to capture the scene surrounding the model and tell a story about that model. Not being discouraged by this competition, I set out to make a diorama for the next build.

The original plan was to build a desert diorama. I brainstormed the design and the types of materials I would need for the build. The desert landscape would consist mostly of rocks, sand, and dirt. In the end, I decided to

change the desert landscape to an urban war scene instead. I really wanted to challenge myself to work more on little details so I can improve my building techniques and have my peers take notice of those little details



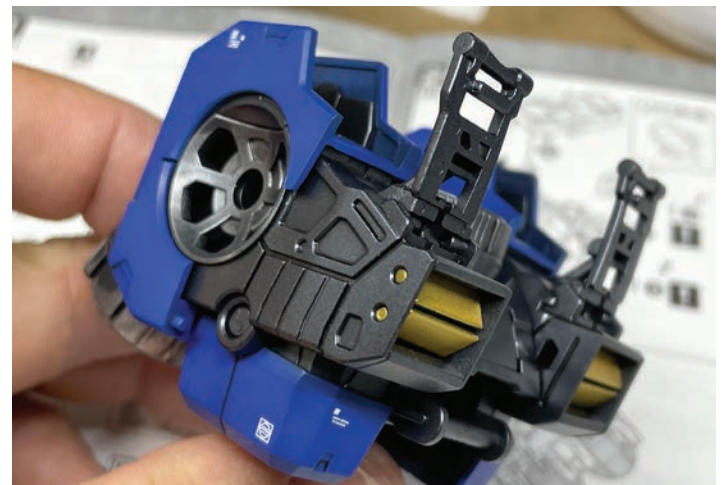
I wanted the main characters of the diorama to be recognizable by anime and mecha robot fans. The three characters were from the original 1978 Gundam television series: the RX-78-2 Gundam, the RX-77-2 Guncannon, and the RX-75 Guntank. All three models are Master Grade size at 1:100 scale. My diorama is a scene depicting a badly wounded Guncannon with the Gundam and Guntank coming to his aid with the backdrop of an urban street in a Japanese city with blown-up buildings.





Each robot model is comprised of two main builds, the inner frame and the outer armors. The inner frames are mechanical parts that resemble the skeleton of the robot. The armor is the outer layer that takes the form of the robot once the assembly is completed.

Just like any other model kit, nub marks and seam lines need to be sanded and cleaned. It is necessary that this is done correctly during the building of the inner frame, or else the parts and pieces that assemble afterward will not fit properly. Remember the gaps I mentioned at the beginning of this article? This is the result of nub marks and seam lines not being sanded smooth for the inner frame.



THE ROBOTS

If you have never built a Gundam model before, it can be a pleasure and a pain. The Gundam model is not the same as cars, planes, trains or figures models. There are many pieces and parts that need to be cut from the runners and assembled in different stages. For those of you who enjoy the little details of putting together tiny little parts to make an arm or a leg, the Gundam models are like a jigsaw puzzle with an instruction booklet that helps you assemble all those parts to your heart's content. If you are a first-time Gundam model builder, all the little parts can be overwhelming.

I usually paint the inner frame in a dark metallic color. The color I selected was dark silver, with some bronze or a brighter silver for the details and accented highlights. I painted the outer armor close to the color schematics of the original models, except for the yellow parts where I substituted a dark metallic gold. I really don't like yellow for the robots, and dark gold gives a nice metallic contrast to the flat red, blue and white colors. I panel-lined the grooves of the armor to give certain sections of the robots more depth, and added waterslide decals for the detail markings. To create the war-damaged look on each

robot, I heated the tip of a hobby knife with a candle and scored the surface of the outer armor. I painted the scored areas with flat black paint and added a bit of silver around the edges on the damaged parts. The left leg of the Guncannon was cut off and pieces of a CAT 5 cable from my old computer were inserted into both ends to show the protruding wires from the damage. I painted the ground black and added a clear gloss coat to create an oil spill from the damaged leg. The ballistic spiral effect from the Guntank was made by heating up clear plastic rods and wrapping them around a metal rod.



THE URBAN SET

Recreating an urban city scene from Japan was new to me. I had no idea what Japan is like because I have never been there. Thanks to the power of the internet and Google street maps, I was able to scan around many cities in Japan and take screenshots on my computer for references. For instance, I didn't know that Japanese traffic drives on the left side of the street, the traffic lights are in a horizontal configuration instead of vertical, and commercial signs cover most of the buildings. I have learned so much of what the streets of Japan look like as I sit behind my computer thousands of miles away.

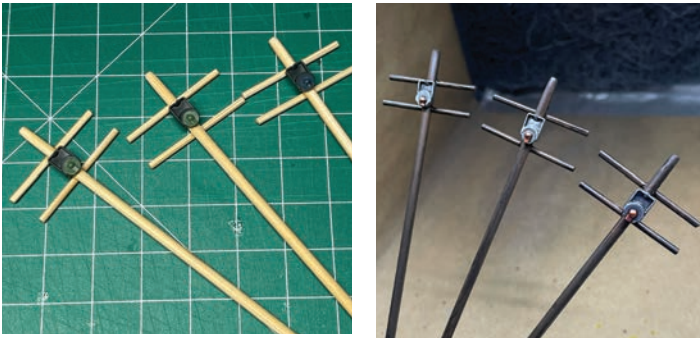
To start the base of the diorama, I used a cork sheet and glued it to a 12-inch x 20-inch piece of plywood. I was able to smooth out the cork to have the texture of asphalt by brushing on a thin layer of modeling plaster. I distressed parts of the cork in the streets to create damage from the explosion of the bomb blasts from enemy fire and painted the street back with a clear semi-gloss topcoat.



Many of the things I wanted to include in the diorama are not sold or cannot be found in stores and hobby shops, so I had to improvise and make them myself. Foam strips were cut and glued for the sidewalks. Broken brick walls and loose bricks were also cut from thin foam sheets and shaped to look destroyed by bombings. The rubble was made from plaster paste spread thinly (1mm – 2mm in thickness), which was allowed to dry and then broken into fine bits to match the 1:100 scale size. Wood debris was cut from small wooden coffee stir sticks, and broken glass was made from finely cut plastic salad containers; this was added to the field of debris.



The telephone poles were made from BBQ skewer sticks, toothpicks, and leftover plastic runner connectors, which I shaped and glued together with thin craft wire.



To create the chain link fence, I cut a metal mesh kitchen strainer into strips at a 45-degree angle to give it the diamond shape in the pattern of the fence. Polystyrene rods were added for the fence posts, with the cut-up pieces of wood from the coffee stir sticks as fence post supports.



I used craft wires and twisted them up to create the trunks of the trees, adding modeling putty to smooth them out before painting and gluing on modeling tree foam for the leaves.



The street signs, building signs, and traffic signs were a little bit tricky to make. I found images on the internet and printed them on high-gloss photo paper. Using photo editing software, I was able to shrink the images down to size at 1:100 to match. I cut soda cans into aluminum sheets and glued the printed signs onto the sheets to make the sign sturdy, then painted the edges with some silver paint. The gantries (traffic sign holders) were built from polystyrene plastic rods, and so are the street lamps. The little details in the diorama were made from common everyday items I found around the house.



I purchased two buildings from MyCity (war-destroyed building models kits) for the main focal points of the urban scene. After sanding, gluing, and removing sprue nubs and seam lines before painting the buildings (as I have done with the robot models), I added details to make them more realistic. The broken window glass was added with rubble and debris to where the buildings had broken sections.



Once the buildings were painted, I used a string of little LED fairy lights (painted with clear red and orange paint) and installed them inside the buildings to imitate glowing fire. Using aquarium filter floss, I made smoke and added to the opening of the destroyed section of the buildings. On the buildings are signs of old anime, Japanese movie posters, and business advertisements as I have seen while I was driving through the streets of Japan via Google Street Maps.

To bring more details to the buildings of this urban scene, I printed images of Japanese graffiti and murals and added them to the base of the buildings.





With the diorama completed, I felt good about my efforts – it was something new and not just a robot by itself on the competition table. At the time of writing this article, I have received three major medals for my diorama – a third place at the IPMS OrangeCon 2025, a second place at the Antelope Valley Group's Desert

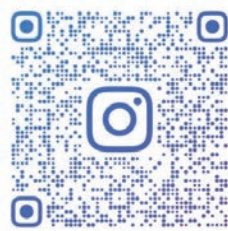
Classic XXVII, and another second place at Modelfest 2026 earlier this year!

So if you ever feel that you've been overlooked even though you did a great job on your model, why not take some time and add a story to your model with a base or a diorama?



IPMS #95755009

INSTAGRAM



@MECHAHOBBYDAD

Minh Thai built mostly cars and planes, but was out of the hobby for over 25 years. In 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic, he started to build Gundam and mecha robots, spurred on by a good friend through Facebook. He recently took interest in diorama building and plans on working on other genres such as sci-fi subjects and fantasy figures. Minh has an extensive backlog that he hopes to finish within his lifetime. You can find more of his works on Instagram at @MECHAHOBBYDAD.