

# Minis Magnified

issue no. 11 Friday, January 7, 2011

## THE COLLECTORS

Artist: Madelyn Cook

Location: Exploring the World Gallery



Greetings and Happy New Year from The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures! This year is already off to an exciting start here at the museum, with stunning new acquisitions making their grand debut. Among these is the magnificent duo, *The Collectors* (c. 1980), a set of His & Hers rooms by Madelyn Cook, each filled with exquisite collectables in a 1:12 scale.

For those of you not already familiar with Cook's work, the first thing to keep in mind is her rich imagination: any one of her pieces has volumes of back-story. Before designing a piece, any good miniaturist will first develop an understanding of the people who would've lived or worked there, as the case may be. To do so requires the artist to become a historian; researching the period's art, culture and architecture, from the rugs on the floor to the roof overhead. Cook's zeal for authenticity is fuel for her creative passion, using the findings in her research as jumping points for the character development and charm that find their way into all of her work.

The concept of these His and Hers rooms stem from the story that an otherwise happy couple finds themselves in a pickle, torn between their two distinct passions for collecting. The wife collects fine porcelain plates and figurines, whereas her husband is an avid collector of Native American artifacts. While both collections are rich in beauty and design, the thought of displaying these two together lacks appeal to both parties. This is where Cook's imagination takes flight, designing separate rooms for each spouse, letting their distinct personalities take hold of the layout.

For the wife, we find a light blue room filled with soft firelight. The lush interior features a crystal chandelier, four pillars and an alcove with marble steps. The recessed shelves which display her acquisitions are arched, as is the entrance to her walled garden, located beyond the left wall. The French desk compliments the cream sofa, which features the loveliest petite-pointe pillows. The porcelain collection itself is simply stunning, featuring Wedgewood style figurines made by Cook using HO scale model railroad figures. Among them are shepherds with sheep, harp players, and deer and bird statues. Alongside Cook's original pieces are plates by Marie Friedman and figures by Frances Steak. The entire room has a silky, feminine aura, reminding the viewer of a gentler time.



*The Collectors* other half - a room designed for the collector of U.S. tribal artifacts - is a prime example of miniaturist as historian, showcasing Cook's artistic ability to capture an object in miniature, never compromising the power of the original. More than a dozen North American tribes are

represented, spanning coast to coast. Masks of the Iroquois and Kwakwilt; headdresses by the Apache and Sioux; and Zuni and Hopi *kachinas*, to name just a few.<sup>1</sup> With no detail forgotten, the viewer is treated to pipes, drums, bows, jewelry, baskets, totems and rugs. Throughout her tribal research Cook was fascinated and awe-struck, eagerly absorbing the legends and mystery surrounding the artifacts of the various cultures. One in particular stood out to Cook, as relayed by Karen Tavernia in her article, *Compatible Collections*:

“The most interesting and humorous discovery was the Cheyenne snow snake. Skiers (the Cooks are avid skiers) blame all falls on phantom snow snakes that are white like snow and trip you quick as a flash. The Cheyenne carve and paint a long spear-type pole to resemble a snake. In winter games, it is thrown like a javelin on a hard, snowy course.”<sup>2</sup>

Historians of Native American culture will find the accuracy of these miniatures remarkable. The collection is so extensive and true to detail that it was on loan during the early 1980s, to The National Geographic Society Museum in Washington, D.C.



We at The Mini Time Machine Museum are thrilled to have this extraordinary work within our walls, as a testament to craftsmanship, imagination and education. *The Collectors* is a thing of beauty and a slice of history - and we think that the Mr. and Mrs. will feel right at home among our own prized collection.

1. *Guide to Indian Artifacts Inventory*. *The Collectors*, journal entry by Madelyn Cook.
2. Tavernia, Karen. *Compatible Collections*. *Nutshell News*, October 1982. p. 82