



CORN HUSK DOLLS SHADOWBOX Pat Arnell, c. 1980 Location: Exploring the World

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The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

Tucson, Arizona

Holidays are a time to celebrate and reflect upon the passing year. For many, it is a chance to partake in traditions that have spanned generations. Here in Arizona, this last Fourth of July was a truly special turning point, with the year 2012 marking our 100th year as a state. Our centennial year was matched by our country's 236th anniversary of Independence – quite young compared to much of the world, but altogether exciting to play witness to how our new-fangled nation has grown. This year has seen a tremendous outpouring of historical artifacts, documents and stories of the early settlers to this state, marking a time in our past that was filled with determination and dreams. My grandmother takes great pleasure in reminding me that her own grandmother came by wagon train to Arizona from Kentucky, instilling a sense of pride in my status as the fourth generation. Having such a small generational gap between the founding members of our state and its current inhabitants is a remarkable thing, one shared by a great number of people in Arizona. Museums and Historical Societies have been buzzing all year, showcasing the treasures of our state's past.

However, this is also a time for somber reflection. My Great-Great-Grandmother and those like her, although new to this state, were not the first to inhabit this land. Arizona contains some of the oldest inhabited areas in North America, with richly developed Native American cultures established thousands of years before the arrival of Spanish missionaries. The canals of Phoenix, Arizona - where my grandmother learned to swim – lay in the routes of *Hohokam* canals conceived as early as 300 AD. In a time before modern conveniences, my grandmother speaks of how hanging wet sheets in the windows provided a cool breeze against triple-digit heat, but this often unforgiving landscape was home to a great



Corn Husk Dolls Shadowbox. Pat Arnell, c. 1980.
Photo by Emily Wolverton.

civilization long before the arrival of resourceful, determined pioneers. Unfortunately, the impact of settlers on Native American cultures is a tragic account, largely due to misinformation and greed, and perhaps the worst part of our human nature, fear itself. Future generations have been able to study the formation of this state with new eyes and an informed conscience, learning from the mistakes of our predecessors while admiring their resolve.

With our state's centennial in mind, I thought it fitting to pay tribute to those early pioneers and the Native cultures which left many impressions upon their daily lives. Located on the wall of our Exploring the World Gallery is a small display, *Corn Husk Dolls Shadowbox*, by our museum Founder, Pat Arnell. This small piece is easily overlooked, with its minimalist design and unassuming characters. There are four cornhusk dolls, including a mother with her baby, a young woman sweeping, and another proudly displaying a freshly baked loaf of bread. Their dresses are plain and their faces are blank except for their eyes, represented by two small black dots. These

dolls have a sweetness to them, enhanced by an earthy, natural quality and perhaps a touch of fragility. They are nostalgic even to a modern child with no memories of ever having received one, for they speak to the imagination and human form. Children have an innate ability to recognize play things, no matter the material. In prehistoric times, dolls were made of bone, clay, wood and fur – and



Corn Husk Dolls Shadowbox (detail). Photo by Emily Wolverton.

they were no less cherished than today's plastic manifestations.

Corn was and continues to be a plentiful staple of American life. What Fourth of July party would be complete without corn on the cob? Traditional fodder such as corn cake, corn pone, dodgers, hominy, and corn bread are still much loved and enjoyed family recipes. The thrifty pioneers enjoyed finding new ways to use the parts of the corn left over, from

the silk to the cob to the husk. Cornhusk dolls were therefore a common gift to pioneer children, even with the availability of store-bought toys. Their design is a direct imitation of cornhusk dolls created by the Iroquois, whose ancestors have created similar dolls since the onset of corn agriculture more than 1,000 years ago. Settlers to this nation fashioned their own versions of these cornhusk dolls, recognizing in the faces of their own children the delight which they have brought to countless children across the ages.

On your next visit to the museum, take the time to seek out our *Corn Husk Dolls Shadowbox*. These dolls are a piece of our shared human past, signaling both our inventiveness and our ever-present love for our children. No matter what realms in time we may visit at The Mini Time Machine Museum, may those two qualities of human nature always remain.

Emily Wolverton
The Mini Time Machine Museum

The Spirit of the Corn noticed that the people were working very hard in order to survive. They were making and repairing their longhouses. They were gathering berries, working in their gardens, sewing, cooking, mending, hunting and fishing. They were always busy. The Spirit of the Corn decided that she wanted to do something that would make the work of the people seem easier. So, she took some of her own cornhusk and made it into a doll. She gave that doll a beautiful face and the ability to walk around and talk. She spoke to Cornhusk Doll and told her that she was to have a very special job. Her job would be to go from village to village and entertain the children. Cornhusk Doll would play games, sing songs and tell wonderful stories. That would make the children smile and laugh. When the adults heard the children laughing, they would remember why they were working so hard. They were working hard so that their children would have a good life. That thought would make the adults happy and they wouldn't mind working so hard. Their work would seem easier.

Cornhusk Doll left right away to go to the first village. When she got there, she played games, sang songs and told wonderful stories. The children were so happy that they smiled and laughed. When the adults heard their children laughing, they remembered why they were working so hard. It was for the children and so their work seemed easier. When it was time for Cornhusk Doll to leave, all of the people gathered around her to say "nia:wen" (thank you). "And by the way, you are very beautiful," they said to Cornhusk Doll.

Cornhusk Doll left to go to the next village. On her way, she stopped by a river. She looked into the water and saw her reflection. "Oh! The people were right. I am very beautiful," she said. She stayed there for a long time, fixing her hair and admiring her pretty face. She stayed so long that the children in the next village didn't think she was going to come visit them. They were sad and started to cry.

When the Spirit of the Corn heard children crying instead of laughing, she looked to see what was wrong. "Cornhusk Doll, you have forgotten your responsibility. You have forgotten about your job!" said the Spirit of the Corn. "I'm so sorry," said Cornhusk Doll. "I promise I won't forget again."

Sadly, Cornhusk Doll forgot about her responsibility again and again. The Spirit of the Corn kept reminding Cornhusk Doll that her job was to make the children happy. But, every time Cornhusk Doll came to a river, she would stop to look at her beautiful face. She would forget about the children and the children would cry. Finally, the Spirit of the Corn took away Cornhusk Doll's face. From that time until today, the *Haudenosaunee* do not give their cornhusk dolls faces. The No Face Cornhusk Dolls remind us that we should take care of ourselves. We should comb our hair, wash our faces and wear clean clothes. But we should also remember to fulfill our responsibilities toward others.

Legend of the No Face Doll, Iroquois Indian Museum