



THE MAGIC OF THE ELVES: HAND-CRAFTED SPRITES BY CYNTHIA BARON

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The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

Tucson, Arizona

The Mini Time Machine Museum had a lovely December, filled with musical performances, family craft activities and special holiday décor featuring various time periods from around the world. With children out of school and folks bringing their out-of-town guests to see our museum, we were truly bustling! Perhaps the most popular place to be was our Enchanted Realm Gallery – which is filled to the brim year-round with scenes of magic and delight – but when the frost nips the air this time of year, the gallery really seems to sparkle. We like to tell visitors that our resident fairy, Caitlin, has a hand in the magic around here, but perhaps this time we ought to give credit where credit is due: to the elves!

Our museum Founder, Pat Arnell, is positively an expert on magical miniatures, and her taste in elves is no exception. Quite a few of the elves in our collection were hand-crafted by the same artisan, Cynthia Baron. A well-known contributor to *Miniature Collector* for years, Baron's skills are first rate with a style distinctly her own. Each figure is rich with personality, eyes merry with mischief and curiosity, and an appearance of



Elves' House, Virgil Goodman & Pat Arnell, 1980. (Detail)
Photo by Emily Wolverton.

illustrated whimsy as though each sprung right from the pages of children's literature. In her article, "A Wonderland of Fictional Figures," author Stormy Williams explains the aesthetic inspiration that



Elves' House, Virgil Goodman & Pat Arnell, 1980. (Detail)
Photo by Emily Wolverton.

gives Baron's pieces such charm.¹ "She attributes a great deal of her present interest and inspiration on the subject of fantasy creatures to her particular fondness for the artistic styles of turn-of-the-century illustrators such as Arthur Rackham, Edmund Dulac and Milo Winter, whose works are conceptually similar in that they create auras of peculiarity which come from surrealistic figures and settings."² This love of the peculiar has seen Cynthia Baron tackle subjects such as Alice in Wonderland, witches and goblins, and even unique film personalities like Charlie Chapman. But it is her elves which continue to bring her fans back, time and time again.

Baron first began creating her figures in 1972, not using clay but rather bread dough, after discovering that a recent miniature purchase had been made by using this material. Her fascination and delight in the process led to experimentation and new methods, including the use of Sculpy®, the material used to create the elves currently in our collection. This type of clay helps to give the bodies of her elves a charismatic lumpiness (typical of a sprite that eats



Coffee Pot Easter Scene, Pat Arnell, 1987.
(Detail). Photo by Emily Wolverton.

too much cake) and the fuzzy hair and beards reveal a lifestyle of unbridled amusement. Moreover, the outfit that each elf wears is as unique as they are. “She takes much care and patience in the costuming

process,” writes Williams. “The primary materials she uses in costumes are specially chosen fabric swatches, of antique materials whenever possible, tiny buttons and accessories for garments, paint for the body and facial expression and Persian lamb’s wool and mink for hair and beards.”³ It becomes quite difficult to pick a favorite among her little figures!

For those looking for a traditional holiday elf setting, you need look no further than our *Elves’ House*. Created in 1980 with the talents of Virgil Goodman and Pat Arnell, this little winter cabin has a surplus of Baron’s elves in a state of high-energy holiday production. Baking cookies, building toys, decorating the tree, and watching over a slumbering Santa are a just of few of their apparent activities. (Incidentally, Baron also made the Santa figure and a number of the little toys.) See if you can spot the elf with a winter cold, nursing an aching head with a hot water bottle! Although elves get their primary dose of attention during the winter holidays, they are certainly a perennial sprite – and our Enchanted Realm is the perfect location for spotting them pursuing other interests. Look for one of Baron’s elves enjoying a dragon flying lesson in our *Academy of Enchantment* (Ron & April Gill, 2002). His brightly colored outfit and two-pronged hat help him stand out from the crowd of onlookers. To see elves in disguise, make your way to our *Coffee Pot Easter Scene* (Pat Arnell, 1987), where two of Baron’s elves are enjoying the springtime, dressed in their bunny

costumes and singing songs. Baron’s little figures seem at home in any backdrop, bringing a measure of cheer with them wherever they may arrive.

It’s nice to know that there are folks out there like Cynthia Baron; people who are successfully doing what they do best, especially when it is the thing they most love to do. We hope that 2013 takes you down your own special path to happiness and fulfillment, no matter how large – or miniature – your dreams may be. And if you need the help of the elves, well, you know where to find them.

Emily Wolverton

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1. Williams, Stormy. “A Wonderland of Fictional Figures.” *Miniature Collector*. Number 12. April, 1979. P. 26 – 27.

2. Ibid, p. 27

3. Ibid, p. 26