



THE IVORY TOWER: MADELYN COOK'S TALE OF THE ECCENTRIC SIR CHELMSLY THROCKMARTON MONTAGUE

Issue No. 40

Thursday, September 12, 2013 The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

Tucson, Arizona

Everyone loves a good story, and for a miniaturist the story is everything. Creating a satisfying miniature scene involves understanding your Lilliputian tenants – knowing their personalities allows a rich tapestry of their would-be world to develop, piece by piece. Without this genuine interest on the part of the miniaturist, there is a vacancy felt by the audience. Like touring a model home, there is an element of life that appears missing – the room is too tidy, there are no knick-knack treasures from vacations past, no cards from nieces on the kitchen counter. Even when a character is absent from the scene, his presence is felt through the sparkle of his career, his hobbies and friends – each made tangible through the simple tokens of everyday life.

Madelyn Cook knows the value of a good story when it comes to miniatures. In fact, you could say that spinning a good yarn is her start to every piece. Anyone familiar with her work knows that she favors the exotic and, just like her, many among her cast of characters are collectors who love to travel. For *Ivory Tower* (Madelyn Cook, c.1980s), Madelyn relished the chance to create an eccentric individual with the means and passion for collecting carved ivory. This particular ivory had of course been collected by Madelyn herself over the span of several years, acquired throughout the U.S. as well as abroad in both China and Japan. The miniature spirit who would be displaying this diverse collection would need to share both her zest for adventure and appreciation of this ancient art form. Who would this very particular person be? None other than Sir Chelmsly



The statue of Sir Chelmsly Throckmarton Montague, which sits atop *Ivory Tower* (Cook, c. 1980s). Photo by Emily Wolverton.

Throckmarton Montague, a tip-top fellow who served the Queen in the British ruling force in India. On a recent phone call, I asked Madelyn how on earth she came up with such a name. “I just had this list of names in my head,” she laughed. “I had several names. I wanted his name to sound important, you know.” A fine and weighty name it is, lending itself perfectly to a person of readily apparent self-aggrandizement: yes, that is a statue of himself on the top of his lofty tower!

Madelyn’s tale tells of how Sir Chelmsly has returned at last to England, his trunks filled with his fine collection and a leisurely retirement

ahead. His dream has been to build his Ivory Tower, a romantic escape and feast for the eyes. This three story fortress of opulence includes an ivory room, living quarters and an office – which is really a “playroom,” as Madelyn describes it. The ivory room, located on the ground floor, is positively luscious: red velvet carpeting alongside red marble pillars, and walls of shelves filled with ivory statuary. Nearly every available surface becomes a platform for ivory display, each no bigger than a quarter. Among the innumerable treasures is a diminutive ivory piano as well as a perfectly lovely desk – tucked inside the desk are books, a quill and letter opener, all made of ivory. Near the fireplace, an ivory chess board has pieces askew as though there was a pause in the game – the only sign of life in this dormant, private museum.



Ivory Tower (Madelyn Cook, c. 1980s). Photo by Michael Muscarello.

The Queen herself would be right at home in Sir Chelmsly Throckmarton Montague’s living quarters. The décor is Eastern elegance at its very best: shining satin, dark wood, clean lines. The walls are an ornate green, complementing the matching marble tile. In the landing, the walls are covered in murals, perhaps of the Italian countryside. We find even more ivory pieces on display here; possibly these pieces have more sentimental value and must be kept close at hand. Onlookers will find the bathroom as luxuriant as the rest of the tower,



The living quarters of the *Ivory Tower* (detail). Carved ivory pieces are featured throughout. The ivory bed posts were cigarette holders in their former life. Photo by Emily Wolverton.

with its creamy tiles and inlaid gold and an enormous marble tub bubbling invitingly. The stained glass window above the tub features a handsome peacock which would no doubt

cast a colorful quilt of light across the room on a bright day. It is here that we are treated to a taste of Sir Chelmsly's private affairs: resting on the side of the tub are two wine glasses and a large plate of caviar, ready for sharing.

But what about those tokens of everyday life that reveal the hidden character? Thus far, the tower is immaculate, telling us more about the diligence of his cleaning staff than Sir Chelmsly himself. Take the last flight of stairs to the tower's third floor and one will find what they have been missing: Sir Chelmsly's office. This office is a great room that reveals his disposition – and Madelyn's sense of humor – as though reading an open book. The room is in a state of charming chaos: packages spread across the tables in stages of unwrap; papers strewn about the shelves; half-eaten watermelon and bottles of imported beer. The room feels lived in, inviting and comfortable and a bit of a mess. Here we find Sir Chelmsly's other interests: hunting and fishing, antique armor, landscape painting and duck decoys. But perhaps the most delightful element of all is Sir Chelmsly's model railroad. A longtime supporter of Tucson's own Garden Railway Society and an active voice on the joys of model railroads and their diversity of scale, Madelyn has gifted Sir Chelmsly with zeal to match her own. The railroad encompasses the entire room, with bits of landscape built directly onto the floor. The train meanders haphazardly across the space; at one point, the track itself is



Sir Chelmsly's railroad travels throughout his office on the third floor of *Ivory Tower*. Originally, this Z scale model train did actually run; however, it continuously became lost behind the fireplace, so Madelyn turned it off!
Photo by Michael Muscarello.



Detail of the third floor coffered ceiling in *Ivory Tower* (Madelyn Cook, c. 1980s).
Photo by Emily Wolverton.

propped up with a stack of books and a bottle of Cutty Sark Scotch. The train is even carrying a load of Sir Chelmsly's books. Madelyn lets us know that this presumably stuffy gentleman has an effortless ease in the comfort of his own home: a bottle of brandy is tucked in a bookshelf, paint has spilled on the floor, and – most amusing of all – a wandering dart has missed its target and pierced an oil painting. Sir Chelmsly's pet beagle is happily surveying the commotion.



Detail of the second floor landing in *Ivory Tower* (Madelyn Cook, c. 1980s). The room features picturesque murals of rolling hills near the sea.
Photo by Michael Muscarello.

Sir Chelmsly's interest in collecting began while serving the Queen, but Madelyn's interest in miniature ivory began as a young girl, admiring the carved elephants belonging to

her grandfather. Madelyn was in high school when he passed away, and she remembers the sting of sadness when his collection was sold. As an adult, she learned about this exquisite art form, practiced in China for well over 2,000 years. Although antique (and ancient) carved Chinese ivory has been collected and admired around the world for centuries, the practice is now a very cautious pursuit. The illegal poaching of elephants has made them one of the most endangered animals on the planet, spurring China to support the UN ban on imported ivory and the outlawing of ivory coming into the country. Unfortunately, bans such as these have made the cost of antique carvings rise exponentially, giving an added incentive to criminals wishing to profit by creating forgeries and aging new ivory to appear old. Collectors like Madelyn take their passion seriously, and understand their moral responsibility with such a delicate balance at stake. It is consequently a wonderful ending to Sir Chelmsly's tale, to see that his collection is now safely stored here at our museum for future generations to enjoy.

Madelyn Cook's *Ivory Tower* will be on special exhibit in our Rotunda gallery through November of this year, as we continue to rotate our wondrous Cook acquisitions. Be sure to stop by the museum to pay tribute to the treasures of Sir Chelmsly – and enjoy some trademark tongue-in-cheek humor by his celebrated creator.



The stained glass window in the second floor bathroom. Note the intricate carved ivory piece above.
Photo by Michael Muscarello.



Even the Z Scale castle in Sir Chelmsly's office has Madelyn Cook's special attention to detail: the walls have been weathered and vines and moss have been added to the exterior. *Ivory Tower*, detail (Madelyn Cook, c. 1980s). Photo by Emily Wolverton.



No piece by Madelyn Cook would be complete without a few samples of her gorgeous needlepoint work. There are several fine examples in *Ivory Tower*, including this pillow in the ivory room. The pillow was made on 40 gauge silk—it takes Madelyn two hours to complete one square inch! Photo by Emily Wolverton.

Emily Wolverton
The Mini Time Machine
Museum of Miniatures



Samples of the extensive carved miniature collection located within *Ivory Tower* (Madelyn Cook, c. 1980s). Photos by Emily Wolverton.



To learn more about the ancient art form of carved ivory, please join us for our newest temporary exhibit: ***Netsuke and Diminutive Carvings from Japan***, September 24, 2013 through December 8, 2013 at The Mini Time Machine Museum.