

**The Doll's House Museum Basel presents:**

## **Just half ... and yet perfect.**

**A special exhibition with over 300 “half dolls” in porcelain, to be held from  
18 October 2008 to 5 April 2009**

**Who has not come across these sophisticated, decorative porcelain figures whose main function was to conceal everyday household objects. In Germany and Switzerland they were known as “Teepuppen”, in Great Britain and the USA they were called “half dolls”.**

### **“Half dolls” by well-known manufacturers**

These valuable female busts were made between 1917 and 1940 by most German and a number of French porcelain manufacturers. The German exhibits come mostly from factories in Bavaria and especially from Thuringia. “Dressel und Kister”, “Goebel”, “Volkstedt” and “Carl Schneider” are the most renowned brands. In response to the enormous success enjoyed by these “half dolls” among the ladies, many smaller manufacturers added their creative efforts.

On some of these “half dolls”, the trademark is engraved in the porcelain or imprinted with blue or black ink. In contrast, the manufacturers of other models can only be identified with the aid of old catalogues from the company archives, while the precise provenance of some objects still remains entirely unknown.

In France, it was “La Porcelaine de Paris” as well as the manufacturers “Henri Delcourt” and “Fourmaintraux & Dutertre” who were involved in the half doll fashion trend of the time. In

1919, “La Porcelaine de Paris” presented a particularly attractive series under the name “Historique”. An emblem featuring two crossed feathers makes it particularly easy to recognise. The provenance of some models can also be ascertained from the inscriptions “Made in France”, “Modèle déposé” or “Terre de Retz”.

### **Fired decorative pieces**

The simplest models with the arms lying alongside the body are made using a mould consisting of two half shells. With the more artistic models, the arms are positioned away from the body and the hands fixed to the waist, the upper body or the head. Additional casting moulds were required if the arms were to suggest movements and particularly if the doll’s hands held a flower or one of many varied objects, ranging from a basket of fruit to a tennis racquet.

The moulded pieces were first fired, then the face, hair and clothing painted by hand, after which they were glazed all over and fired again at 800° C. If the clothing or jewellery was to be gold in colour, a third firing at over 1000° C was necessary.

The three or four unglazed holes in the base served to secure the body of the “half doll” to a plinth using wire or linen thread. The plinth was made of cardboard or a metal skirt which the purchaser was able to dress with a wide fabric skirt. The ladies of the time loved these charming models of women and children; they bought them in department stores or ordered them at fashion magazines. Then they made clothing for them from luxurious or simple materials according to their intended use as decorative or practical items.

Placed upon a table or dressing table, the colourful skirts might conceal a teapot, a sweet jar or chocolate box for example or perhaps the telephone. Alternatively, they might have served as a handle for a powder puff, a table wiper, a clothes brush, etc.

In France, major Paris brands used these dolls to decorate their bonbonnières of sweets “La Marquise de Sévigné” or powder compacts “Henry – A la pensée”. As focal points in the shop window, they were snatched up by women in no time.

These finely-made “half dolls” are evidence of the high-quality craftsmanship and wealth of that era. The first world’s fairs in London and Paris at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century were responsible for the increasing numbers of these earthenware and porcelain figures on the market. Manufacturers negotiated with wholesalers and exporters, the first catalogues were published. During this heyday of interior decoration, the “half dolls” were shown off to their best advantage as popular ornaments in most households.

## **A huge variety of models**

The 1920s were initially dominated by the little “Marquises”, but the porcelain manufacturers took advantage of the growing success and soon launched a wide range of models.

Alongside the “Marquises” and figures from the time of “Napoleon III”, the exhibits include depictions of “pierrots”, “folklore and regional figures”, “children”, “animals”, “heads” and of course the much sought-after “Garçonnes” (flappers) and “Art Deco” figures that followed woman’s great social and cultural evolution in real time.

Indeed the 1920s’ woman craved freedom; she does sport, drives her car, aspires to a slim look and casual appearance. She shortens her skirts, emphasises her waist and wears her hair in a bob, opening up the way for the “modern woman” so perfectly epitomised by Coco Chanel.

Even today, “half doll” collectors are constantly on the look-out for these pretty porcelain figures with straight, short hair, close-fitting bodices, cloche hat or broad-brimmed bonnet over heavily made-up eyes.

Two other variants – made only in limited numbers and correspondingly rare – are “les Chocolatières” and “les Médiévales”. Unique to the “Dressel & Kister” factory in Passau (Bavaria) was a series of “medieval dolls” accompanied by the statues from which they were derived. These “half dolls” are faithful reproductions of the statues and, although the bust is naked to enable the purchaser to clothe it, they have identical golden necklaces, hairstyles and accessories. The exquisite, artistically painted facial features and sophisticated dress make them the favourites of every collector who appreciates female elegance and distinctive femininity. Some porcelain manufacturers switched to the depiction of historic figures and famous portraits, others created models of theatrical divas, dancers and great music hall stars of the 1920s in their studios.

## **From the largest private collection in Europe**

The exhibits on display in the Doll’s House Museum come from one of the largest private collections of “half dolls” in Europe. Their loan has made it possible for this prestige exhibition to examine a popular and yet little known subject and to focus on these small porcelain gems that embellished the interiors of our parents’ and grandparents’ homes. From the Middle Ages to the style of the Napoleonic era, they vividly evoke the time of their creation, namely that of the “Garçonne” fashion and of “Art Deco”.

Madame Marie Petitfrère from Paris, who has made her unique collection available to the Doll’s House Museum, is also the author of a reference work on the subject of “half dolls”.

This fascinating collection is being shown for the first time in Switzerland. It consists of over 300 dolls, all of which originate from the years between 1917 and 1940. Inspired by the “Golden Twenties”, the Doll’s House Museum is displaying the objects in the strong light and

dark purple shades popular at the time. Elements from the “Art Deco” period also form part of the setting.

The “Golden Twenties” was a glamorous time. Fashion set out to be provocative and shocking, typified by the incredibly long cigarette holders. Pearl necklaces, boas, headbands and handbags were almost indispensable evening-wear items. Many found the hairstyles aggressive; the famous bob cut replaced the bun with hairpins. Prior to this time, it had been considered outrageous for a woman to wear her hair short.

In the exhibition, the “half dolls” are arranged in subject areas: “The beauties”, which include objects with accessories such as mirrors, feathers, muff, etc., “Animals, children and traditional costumes”, “Renowned porcelain manufacturers”, “Accessories”, Half dolls with flowers, fruit baskets, etc. or “Mounted parts” such as powder puffs, lampshades, etc. Among the rare half dolls are the “Noble young ladies from the Middle Ages” with lace and pointed bonnets or the “Chocolate girls”, derived from the famous painting by the 18th-century Swiss artist Jean-Etienne Liotard. Of course, the “Ladies of the Belle Epoque” with opulent hats or the “Marquises” from the 18th century, the “Pierrots” and the “Bob-cut ladies” must not be omitted.

All of these dolls have one thing in common: they have no lower body, hence the name “porcelain half dolls”. These female busts decorated our grandmothers’ dressing tables, coffee tables and sewing boxes. Some of the half dolls were not solely decorative, but served as tea cosies, powder puffs, lamps, pin-cushions, clothes brushes, table bells and many other things.

### **Workshops for children aged 6 and above**

The Doll’s House Museum has not neglected our youngest visitors either. In workshops to accompany this exhibition, children aged 6 and above are given an opportunity to decorate their own “half doll” and take it home with them as a souvenir.

Under expert supervision, the children can decorate their chosen “half doll” (6 subjects are available). They can allow their imagination to run riot. Sequins, pearls, feathers, ribbons and much more are provided free of charge. Using original moulds, the “half dolls” were cast in porcelain especially for the workshops to accompany this exhibition.

Workshop dates:

Every Saturday/Sunday from 14.00 - 18.00

25.10./26.10.2008

08.11./09.11.2008

22.11./23.11.2008

13.12./14.12.2008

20.12./21.12.2008

27.12./28.12.2008

03.01./04.01.2009

24.01./25.01.2009

07.02./08.02.2009

21.02./22.02.2009

14.03./15.03.2009

### **Opening hours**

Museum, Shop and Café: daily from 10.00 - 18.00

### **Admission**

CHF 7.00 / 5.00

Children up to 16 years of age are admitted free of charge and only in the company of adults.

No additional charge for the special exhibition.

The entire building is wheelchair-accessible.

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