

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

## **Dolls As Reflections Of Times Past**

### **Pocket dolls: A journey through time from Mignonnette to Polly Pocket™**

The Doll's House Museum Basel presents a selection of the most beautiful and interesting mignonnettes from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (up to 1950). The central attraction will be the legendary Mignonnette, which enjoyed such a great success from 1878 onwards essentially due to her extensive trousseau and clothes wardrobe. Amongst the 200 exhibits, which have been lovingly arranged in the Museum, there will be a varied collection of clothes, accessories, furniture and decorative items.

#### **The history of small dolls up to the Mignonnette**

The history of small and even very small dolls can be traced back to antiquity. However, the actual concept for the mignonnette, which was to revolutionize the doll-making industry, took place towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in France.

The more well-known precursors of the pocket dolls are:

- the all-wooden dolls from Val Gardena, with their wooden-pin joints
- «Hitty», an American travelling doll produced during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and measuring 15 cm
- «Frozen Charlotte», a bisque porcelain or porcelain bath doll, produced in one piece around 1850
- doll's house dolls, with porcelain or bisque porcelain bust heads and limbs as well as stuffed cloth bodies (soft bodies)
- «Parisiennes» (Parisian dolls) with leather bodies and bisque porcelain or porcelain heads, which were produced in France and Germany

A decisive step in the development of the modern all-bisque articulated pocket doll (subsequently called mignonnette) was laid by Fernand Sustrac on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1877, when he patented his invention of wooden elbow and knee ball joints for dolls not measuring more than 20 cm. More than 2 years later, on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1879, Maurice Schmitt registered a virtually identical patent, but was never prosecuted by Sustrac. Pocket dolls or «Poupées de poche» measured 12 to 14 cm, were pale in colour and usually barefoot. Towards the end of the 1870s such pocket dolls with painted and moulded stockings and shoes appeared on the market.

### **Mignonnettes as Collectors' Items**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century doll lovers' collections consisted exclusively of very rare and exceptional dolls. For a long time mignonnettes were therefore not considered to be desirable collectors' items. They were regarded as accessory dolls, which were sometimes laid in the arms of a more valuable doll. It was not until relatively recently that collectors recognized the rarity and rise in value of these small diversified dolls and how multi-faceted and interesting a mignonnette collection could actually be. Today the mignonnette is one of the most important types of dolls in collectors' circles and in this way has regained some of the importance that it held as a toy doll for young girls at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Birth of the Mignonnette (1878 – 1883)**

The success story of the mignonnette began with the French girls' magazine «La Poupée Modèle» and Madame Lavallée-Péronne, owner of the Parisian dolls' shop «A la Poupée de Nuremberg». For economic reasons, close business ties were maintained between the publishing family of «La Poupée Modèle» and the doll trader in order to guarantee the financial well-being of both parties. On the one hand Madame Lavallée-Péronne provided the magazine with interesting articles about dolls which attracted the young, female readers, and on the other hand her particular dolls' shop was recommended to be the best.

In August 1878 Lavallée-Péronne started a new column in «La Poupée Modèle», in which she wrote about this «Poupée Modèle». She not only wrote about the first pocket doll, which could be purchased in her shop for the price of «1 franc 75 centimes». As a special surprise, there was also a real cloth do-it-yourself kit enclosed in the magazine, which enabled the reader to create the first outfits of a complete wardrobe series, which would fit the doll on offer. From then on, the magazine regularly enclosed paper sewing patterns or authentic cloth patterns (mainly made out of light cotton or linen) with sewing instructions and material tips for making dolls' clothes. At times it was recommended to use more luxurious materials like velvet or crêpe de Chine. In addition, there were printed plans for making fashionable accessories and interior decoration items, such as furniture (made from cardboard), as well as board walls to create complete rooms. This way the young readers could create their own dolls' world. The extensive trousseau with its contemporary, modern clothing was also the reason for the great success of this all-bisque pocket doll measuring 13 cm. The young ladies were thrilled and wanted more.

Then in the February 1880 edition of «La Poupée Modèle» the doll was named, for the first time, «Mignonnette». This agreeable-sounding name was quickly accepted by the targeted female readers and almost immediately replaced the general term of pocket doll or «poupée de poche». The looks and trousseau of the mignonnette attracted the targeted teenage readers, who were almost adolescent at 15 years of age.

This all-bisque mignonnette produced in France in the first 5 years measured 12 cm to 14 cm and was thin. She had fixed glass eyes, a closed mouth, a mohair wig with long blond hair, was jointed at the neck, the shoulders and the hips and was barefoot. However she did not yet have elbow and knee joints.

### **Strong Competition from Germany (1883 – 1891)**

When Madame Lavallée-Péronne retired in 1883, her first employee, Mademoiselle Régnault, took over the dolls' shop «A la Poupée de Nuremberg». However, the continuation of the work had suddenly become much more difficult. Dramatic changes in the overall doll and dolls' clothes industry and the decreasing novelty

aspect of the mignonnette led to a real slump in business and to such losses, that the dolls' shop was forced to close in 1891.

An important reason for this development seems to have been the more modern German mignonnette version produced by Simon & Halbig. She was more suited to the prevailing ideal of esthetic beauty with her round, chubby little body, than the very thin and pale French model. In addition, the Simon & Halbig doll had sleep eyes and a slightly open mouth, which showed sweet little baby teeth in the upper row. She wore long black stockings and brown shoes, which were very fashionable at the time. At that time she measured 13 cm; whereas in subsequent years (1907 – 1917) she measured 15 cm. The standard size was an important factor: this doll was to incite the young readers to use the sewing patterns enclosed in the magazine or even to purchase the finished miniature clothes in the shop. The success was not slow in coming. A corresponding market developed which grew so much that the production centre for mignonnettes was taken over by Germany, where more firms produced mignonnettes. Despite this fact, there was still talk in France of the doll being «made in France».

Mademoiselle Régnault took action. Shortly before the demise of her shop, she launched the Simon & Halbig doll. Unfortunately it was too late to save her shop «A la Poupée de Nuremberg».

### **«La Poupée Modèle» and the Revival (1891 – 1907)**

The loss of its most important business partner created a big problem for the publisher of «La Poupée Modèle», Fernand Thiéry. The important contributions which he had received from Mademoiselle Régnault in connection with her shop «A la Poupée de Nuremberg» stopped immediately. He therefore needed to find, as soon as possible, a new and willing partner with an equivalent range of dolls. This proved to be a difficult task as a large number of the small toy shops in Paris had been put out of business by competition from the large department stores.

As an immediate measure, Thiéry decided the only solution possible was to take over the whole inventory of the shop «A la Poupée de Nuremberg» and begin to sell the dolls himself—by direct mail-order—to his readers. In the following years «La

Poupée Modèle» published more articles about the mignonnette than ever before, and its popularity enjoyed a real revival at the end of the 19th century, thanks to the German model. This generation of mignonnettes measured 13 cm and still had sleep eyes, a mouth which was slightly open showing the upper row of teeth, mainly black painted stockings and brown shoes with or without heels. The impact of fashion trends and historical events on the mignonnettes' wardrobe of clothes was very noticeable and typical for this golden age. For example, after the Dreyfus Affair in France in the early 1890s, lawyers' and judges' garments appeared in the assortment of clothing on offer.

### **The Decline of the Classic Mignonnette (1907 – 1917)**

«La Poupée Modèle» was able to maintain its position in France as market leader in the segment of magazines for children and girls until about 1905. This changed practically overnight with the first publication of the conservative review «La Semaine de Suzette». One reason was that French society was changing. The separation of the church from the State and the fact that traditional perceptions of values and morals again gained importance in daily life, meant that girls from well-to-do homes now subscribed to this new magazine and no longer to the more sophisticated «La Poupée Modèle». Another reason was certainly the appearance of the doll «Bleuette», from the magazine «La Semaine de Suzette», which measured 27 cm and was a sales hit.

When Thiéry realized that times had changed, he tried to keep up with the market and introduced his «Benjamine», which measured 26 cm. «La Poupée Modèle» focussed almost solely on this new doll. In this way he almost completely neglected the mignonnette and its market slumped. The young girls began to forget about mignonnettes. When World War I broke out in Europe and the delivery of the German Simon & Halbig dolls could no longer be guaranteed, the magazine wrote categorically in 1917 «The small all-bisque dolls are completely sold out and they will never be available again.»

## **The Era after the Mignonnette**

The end of the mignonnette of course did not result in the end of the pocket dolls as such. Already around 1910 the so-called bath dolls appeared and were popular until the 1950s. They were made out of celluloid and measured 5 to 15 cm. After World War II these little dolls were made out of hard plastic. They were produced in France, Italy and Germany.

In the post war era of the 1950s and 1960s it was above all the Ari dolls which enchanted the children in Europe. These little German dolls were made out of caoutchouc and measured 6 to 15 cm. They were predominantly dressed in folk or town costumes.

Further important and successful pocket dolls were/are:

- the American «Kiddles», otherwise known as «Littles», from the 1960s and 1980s, measuring 5 cm and complete with their own small transportable universe consisting of a little house, furniture and clothing
- «Dawn» und «Pippa», the mini fashion dolls of the 1970s measuring 17 cm and complete with an extensive clothes wardrobe and many accessories packed in a handbag
- Polly Pocket™, a miniature doll which in 1989 and especially in the 1990s was to be found in many schoolgirls' pockets

## **Mignonnettes in the Doll's House Museum Basel**

In the Doll's House Museum Basel we are presenting to visitors an interesting selection of authentic mignonnettes, e.g. all-bisque articulated dolls from France and Germany including dolls from «La Poupée Modèle», Simon & Halbig, Kämmer & Reinhardt, Kestner, Kühnlenz. In addition we are also displaying a series of other miniatures, e.g. pocket dolls such as «Lilliputiens», «Minuscules», doll's house dolls and Ari dolls. The exhibits, which are lovingly arranged in special showcases, are complete with matching trousseaus, clothing and accessories. This exhibition has only been made possible thanks to the «Musée de la Poupée, Paris», which was

willing to make their outstanding collection of these dolls available to us. Mr. Samy Odin, the director of the museum in Paris, gave us the benefit of his considerable and well-founded knowledge of mignonnettes and helped us greatly in presenting such a comprehensive exhibition.

### **Live Demonstration**

On specific days during the special exhibition in the Dolls' House Museum Basel, a leading doll maker, Mrs. Veronica Mussoni, will make live demonstrations, showing how to handcraft miniature dolls. She forms the heads and limbs herself out of top quality bisque porcelain and constructs the flexible bodies with special wire. She will also show the elaborate creation of the dolls' clothes, which involves the sewing of underwear, petticoats and wonderful costumes, which are completed by matching hats, shoes and accessories.

Preliminary Dates for the Demonstrations, which take place as from 1 pm:

30./31.10.2004 (Sat./Sun.), 1.11.2004 (Mon.), 13./14.11.2004 (Sat./Sun.),  
27./28.11.2004 (Sat./Sun.), 11./12.12.2004 (Sat./Sun.), 18./19.12.2004 (Sat./Sun.),  
8./9.1.2005 (Sat./Sun.), 29./30.1.2005 (Sat./Sun.)

**Legal Information**

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**Bibliography**

- Héritier, Mathilde und Odin, Samy (Ed.): Mignonnette: her history, wardrobe and miniature world, 1878–1917, Editions Musée de la Poupée, Paris, 2003.
- Musée de la Poupée, Paris ([www.museedelapoupeeparis.com](http://www.museedelapoupeeparis.com)).
- Le cercle privé de la poupée ([www.poupendol.com](http://www.poupendol.com)).

**Opening times:**

Museum/Shop: daily from 11 am to 5 pm, Thursdays until 8 pm

Café: daily from 10 am to 6 pm, Thursdays until 9 pm

**Admission:**

CHF 7.— / 5.—

Children up to 16 years are admitted free of charge, and only if accompanied by an adult.

The museum does not charge supplementary fees for special exhibitions.

The museum is wheelchair accessible.

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