

# Adele's Creative Costuming

a quarterly newsletter

## Welcome back!

**IN EVERY ISSUE** of the “Creative Costuming” newsletter we strive to bring you creative information that will inspire you on your next creative project. Well, in this newsletter, I know that we have successfully achieved our goal!

We are very proud and honoured to have as our featured artist, Mr. George Stuart. You will be amazed at his work! For nearly five decades, as an artist and historian, he has created one-quarter life-size historical figures to accompany dramatic historical monologues. I speak from experience as I have had the privilege of taking some master classes from Mr. Stuart, and I can't say enough about this brilliant man. In 1978 he donated 200 of his figurative art pieces to the Museum of Ventura County, and I was able to visit this Museum to see his collection, and they are breathtaking. You too, will be in awe of his figures, many of which we have selected for this issue. I, for one, can't stop looking at the details, and am amazed at how real his figures look. The man, in his 80's, still continues to deliver monologues three times each month at the museum's Smith Gallery, surrounded by a rotating selection of his figures.

Marie Antoinette is also among the stars that will be gracing our newsletter pages. Our focus is on late 18th century costuming and hairstyles. As a bonus we have added a dress pattern plus the pannier (hip baskets) for you to try your hand at re-creating this era of costuming.

We didn't stop there! We have included a list of period movies to inspire you, and three books for you to consider adding to your resource library.

As a special treat, I have included my trip to “Broadway Bears” in Manhattan, New York. These special bears are donated by the North American Bear Company to have designers costume, drape, embellish, hat, paint, stuff, wig and bejewel, and then they are auctioned off at a gala affair with the proceeds going to fight AIDS. What a wonderful experience that was and I just wanted to share the journey.

In our last issue we announced our first costuming challenge; all entries will be posted in our Summer 2009 newsletter. Let's make this a great challenge! So send in your creative carnival costuming images to share with our readers.

Once again, if you have a particular challenge or difficulty with a specific part of your costuming, send us an email, and we can use this as a topic of discussion or go into an in-depth analysis for a probable solution.

I look forward to hearing from you and getting your invaluable comments.

Until the next time.....

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Countess  
Jeanne Du Barry  
by George Stuart

# A Life Misspent?

by Kathy Henri & George Stuart



Queen Marie Antoinette,  
at Court



Henry VIII



Kang Hsi Emperor.  
Private Collection

**WHY QUARTER-LIFE-SIZED** figures in a mixed medium, why Historical Figures®? This is a question that George Stuart has asked himself a number of times over the years.

He had no formal training in any handcraft, his education was entirely academic, and after a three-year stay in Santa Barbara he was headed back to Washington, D.C. to pursue what he thought was a career in the State Department. But there he was in Santa Barbara on a New Year's Day morning, when suddenly he was overcome with the desire to create a quarter-life-size figurine. He knew nothing of scale or how to begin construction. He was however, filled with the image of a portrait he'd seen of Louis XVI in his court robes. Nothing like beginning with a "simple" idea!

Stuart had no tools or materials ready, but within hours he'd found some wire and paper tape, and bits of cloth and cotton for padding, and was busy at work. It took several days for the image to come together. Truth be told, the end product was more an image in his mind's eye than in fact.

These early efforts were probably George Stuart's one truly creative period. The heat of the moment and the drive to make his dream a reality consumed him. Of course, the results were at best crude and clumsy, but he was inspired. During his remaining months in Santa Barbara Stuart threw himself into production of more figurines. A companion; Marie Antoinette, then a Napoleon, and then others soon followed his first figure. He was sometimes churning out a Figure a day. Before Stuart



Peggy Shippen



Countess Jeanne de la Motte



Countess Jeanne Du Barry



Princess Marie Therese de Lambelle



Queen Charlotte Sophia



Duchess Yolande de Polignac

left for the east coast, he had revised all his original figures, perfecting their flaws and defects. This desire for perfection through revision followed him throughout the next fifty years. He likes nothing better than to go back and revise or improve an earlier work. Stuart says, "I'm not a traditional artist. I enjoy reworking my material." Of course, over the following half-century, he perfected his "craft," if you want to name it that. He remains an 'autodidact': a self-taught craftsman. He found that this was not at all unusual in other artists. In fact, whatever field of skill one examines, one finds that the most successful practitioners learn their skills as they practice.

Stuart says he has never had the slightest interest in "dolls," and has never connected what he does with that culture. This may offend many really fine doll makers, and he recognizes them for the artist-craftspeople that they are, but doll making is something he doesn't do. His place in the wide field of the arts is as a sculptor. True, his form of sculpture is extremely idiosyncratic, and does not fit the narrow vision of many in the art field. Stuart is gratified to see that there is beginning to be a narrow break in this "constipated view." He has discovered that there are many men and women who perhaps started their creative careers as doll makers, but who turned away from the obvious doll images to craft images with much sharper edges and a realism rarely found sixty years ago. Some of these newer artists are demonstrating real genius with their evocative works. Stuart cites Lisa Lichtenfels and the late Robert McKinley as two of these.

The emergence of collectible "action figures" for men has been part of the movement to give small scale figurines in mixed media and with movable parts an acceptance that distinguishes them from dolls. Their creators too started as toy makers, but have gone way beyond that in a very short time since this new trend took hold.

The fact that these new products are entering sophisticated art collections where one would never find the traditional "doll" is a big step forward for sculptors in small-scale figurative art.

One aspect of the Stuart Figures that sets them apart from many others is Stuart's emphasis on making one-of-a-kind pieces, executed in exacting detail. In a culture where handcraft has virtually disappeared for the average citizen and where small detail skills are often overlooked in the noisy environment of modern life, an appreciation for this non-traditional art form is enjoying a remarkable renaissance.



King Charles I



King George III  
in Robes of State



George I



King Louis XIV  
(equestrian)

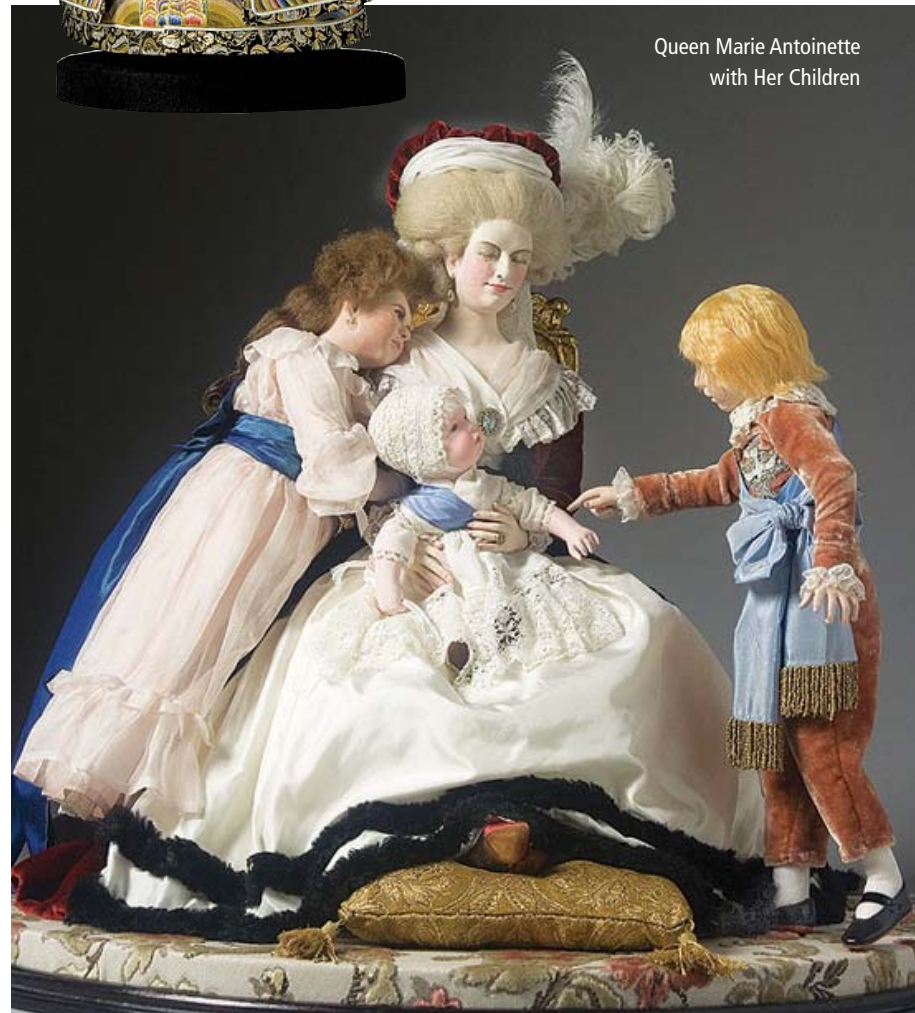
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## ARTIST FEATURE

George Stuart never entered the State Department. He says, "...the nation was spared, and so was I..." His true loves were architecture and the theatre. His math skills were too poor to develop anything but a love for old world architecture, but he did pursue his theatrical bent for a number of years in both Manhattan and California.

Stuart loved Washington, D.C., but as the 1950s wound to a close he once again journeyed to California and friends he'd made in the few years he had spent there in the 1940s and early 1950s. It was there he threw himself into making his Historical Figures (now a registered trademark). His first big show was at Stanford University and was well received. He was encouraged, but wondered where would this lead? He was without a dependable career, and knew he didn't possess the drive and ambition to become a success in the theatre or in Hollywood. He complained to a fellow performer in the stock company they were a part of, and it was suggested that he think of going on the circuit as a public speaker. This had never occurred to him! Why not combine his university education and his years in the theatre, and use the Historical Figures as props?

Fortunately, he was taken as a client by the Brown Agency in Beverly Hills, which had a distinguished stable of speakers.





General  
John Burgoyne



Oliver Cromwell



Marquis  
de la Fayette

Stuart was honored to be part of this group, and spent the next thirty years touring the country doing his “act” with the Figures. His emphasis was on the story of the famous and infamous and was rich with scandals and intrigue, death and destruction. The audiences seemed to like it, and no one had seen anything like the Figures.

By the 1980s Stuart was sick of traveling and the pressures of deadlines. A previous connection with the Ventura County Historical Society (now the Museum of Ventura County) in Ventura, California, led to a position as Curator Emeritus. A collection of 180 of the Historical Figures now had a place to be exhibited, and they gave Stuart a regular schedule of performances at the Museum that was not too demanding and was entertaining for him. He also began to receive commissions for Figures.

For a number of years now Stuart has produced his sculptures for a select group of collectors. These Figures are as intricate as ever, and are made to meet the desire of the collectors. Clients came from word of mouth, and remain as private as Stuart himself. Outside of the Museum of Ventura County, his Figures are rarely exhibited.

As noted earlier, Stuart’s work began with Figures of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. The time period of 18th century France has always been fascinating to Stuart, beginning in childhood when his family visited Versailles. The trip had such an impact on him that

he built a scale model of the palace in his parents’ back yard! To date, Stuart has completed multiple versions of portraits of Marie Antoinette and members of the French royal family, showing them in a variety of poses and clothing. While all Stuart’s Figures are amazing in detail, the French Figures are often the favorite of the public. Stuart spends hours researching period costume and accessories in a wide variety of sources, including costume history books and paintings from the period. One vibrant example of this research influencing Stuart’s work is his portrait of Marie Antoinette with her children. It is remarkably similar to a portrait of the same subjects painted by Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun in 1787.

Stuart has also had the knack of a collector when it comes to fabrics and trims. Over the last sixty years he has amassed a large collection of historic fabrics, laces, leathers, and other materials that he uses for many of the Figures. Because the Figures are built to a scale of one-quarter life size, any pattern or weave in the materials must match that scale, which can be a difficult matter to resolve. In recent years, Stuart has also learned a great deal about the longevity of the materials he has used to build the Figures, and is constantly thinking about ways to improve in this area. For example, early Figures often had jewelry or other accessories made of lead, which has since corroded badly. Stuart now has such pieces cast in bronze and plated.

While Stuart did not receive formal training in sewing, metalworking, shoemaking,



Napoleon  
Bonaparte

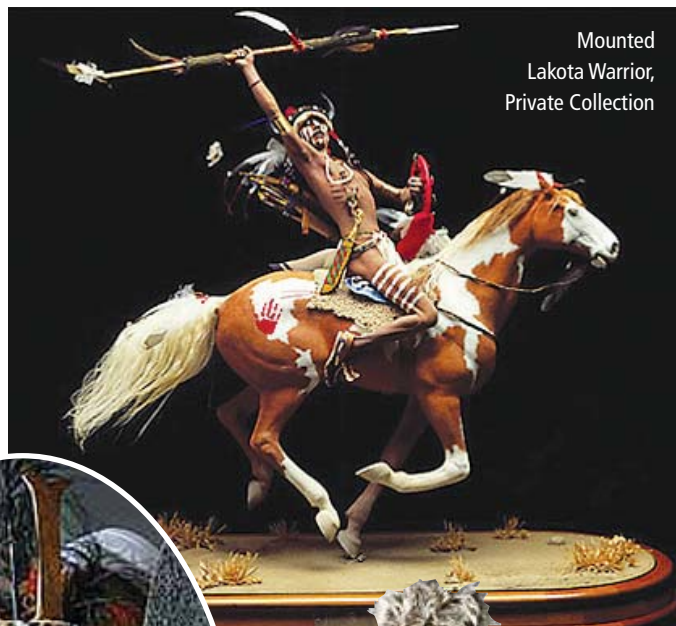
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## ARTIST FEATURE

or other facets of the Figures, he has learned from other practitioners of these crafts along the way. Occasionally he will also employ the services of “helpers” to have fine embroidery or other specialized pieces made, but for the most part, the Figures are entirely constructed by Stuart.

In 2007, Stuart held a workshop for ten interested artists, where his method of building figurative sculptures was taught. He returned to the subject in 2008, with a workshop focusing on sculpting heads. Due to requests from students, he is planning another workshop for 2010, this time focusing on costume and accessories from France in the second half of the 18th century. Stuart does not claim to be an expert on the subject, but has acquired a degree of knowledge after all these years of study. The much-misunderstood Marie Antoinette has so captivated writers and artists for the last two hundred years that her fabled wardrobe will be a fascinating area to explore with the group. During the workshop, Stuart will endeavor to expand on the eccentric styles of the 1770s and 80s. He will show how French styles spread throughout Europe and how they were reflected in different areas.

The workshop will also focus on the construction of a scale garment from the period, including corseting, skirt support, and appropriate trims and accessories. Stuart finds this an interesting subject and will be pleased to share his knowledge with



Mounted  
Lakota Warrior,  
Private Collection



Zulu Warrior,  
Private Collection



Mountain Man,  
Private Collection



Queen Victoria  
1860



Charles II

others. The workshop is tentatively scheduled for April, 2010. Please contact Kathy Henri ([kathy@kathyhenri.com](mailto:kathy@kathyhenri.com)) for more information, or to be put on the list for future updates.

Also visit George Stuart's website at [www.galleryhistoricalfigures.com](http://www.galleryhistoricalfigures.com) to see the gallery of his works, including the French Figures. The Museum of Ventura County is in the midst of an expansion, so only a few Figures at a time are on display. Visit the Museum's website, [www.venturamuseum.org](http://www.venturamuseum.org), for more information. ☺

All figures shown are part of the Museum of Ventura County Collection, unless otherwise indicated.