

It is not unusual for people looking at photographs of George Stuart's one-of-a-kind figures to believe they are pictures taken of real people. Indeed they are but models made to scale made by this peculiar designer who prefers to regard himself as an historian rather than an artist, though looking at his magnificent works of art there is little doubt what kind of great artist he is.

(All figures 1/4th scale)

George Stuart

Photo credits:
G.S. Stuart Historical Figures®
Photo by Peter D'Aprix©



A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

George Stuart, now in his seventies, is an historian and monologist. He was a long time member of the Ventura County Arts Commission. Mr. Stuart is

also the Curator of the Historical Figures Collection now housed in the Ventura County Museum of History and Art. The Historical Figures® are Mr. Stuart's unique concept; three-dimensional, quarter life-size portraits of history's famous and infamous.

In his academic career at Georgetown University and with his degree from the University of California he never envisioned what lay ahead. Theater, not the Foreign Service was Stuart's real love. For over thirty-five years he has used his talents to bring alive the personalities and times of the remarkable people from the past. His emphasis is on power and political intrigue. George Stuart has developed over twenty programs using the Historical Figures® as visual aids. Men and women from American, European and Asian societies are featured, stretching from the twentieth century back to the time of Columbus. Stuart now lives and develops his programs in Ojai, California.

"Henry VIII" inspired by Holbein's portrait of the English King. A tour-de-force of gems set in gold. The famous codpiece is protruding from his war kilt. Barry Kaye collection.



*Charles X (Bourbon) King of France
c.1820s Artist's Collection.*

To observe and listen to George Stuart it is hard to believe that he started making his first Historical Figures® over fifty years ago! He was then a mature man with career goals that had nothing to do with the arts. Now, one half century later, Mr Stuart is still at his bench producing some of his best work to date. In an effort to use his training, interests and skills he undertook a career change which he had never imagined... the field of monology. Monology is as old as story telling. The great benefit of being a monologist is that you are your own cast, director, production manager and producer.

Mr. Stuart has fulfilled those activities. He had many years working in the theater. His university degrees provided him with a wide range of knowledge in history, economics and international affairs. When he began monology he was young and personable and best of all he had the Historical Figures... that was something no one else had.

Between the years 1960 to 1980 he was under management and busily giving his monologs throughout the United States. When he wasn't on the road, he was working to make new Figures for the next season and developing the monolog to go with them.

Professionally Mr. Stuart is known as a monologist and public speaker, but he might be said to be famous for the Historical Figures. This is the unique aspect of his work in these past decades. While there are many artists producing small scale articulated figurative sculptures in a mixed media, there are very few indeed who concentrate on historical "portraiture". His depictions of the famous and infamous from ages past are remarkable for their accuracy and subtlety.

George Stuart is not bursting to tell everyone how he does what he does. He is more interested in the history of the subject he is portraying. In fact, Stuart is not typical of artists in general. He has little interest in the "process" of what he does; but he will gladly share his views on any number of issues that face society today and the problems that society has faced in the past.

As an autodidact, he has had to learn how to do all the various crafts that go into making his Historical Figures. He always welcomes instruction and training from people with specific skills that he needs to include but does not himself possess. He has worked with many other craftsmen during this time, including weavers, jewelers, diemakers, cabinet makers and embroiderers. He occasionally has fabric woven to his order and he frequently employs an embroiderer to help him finish some



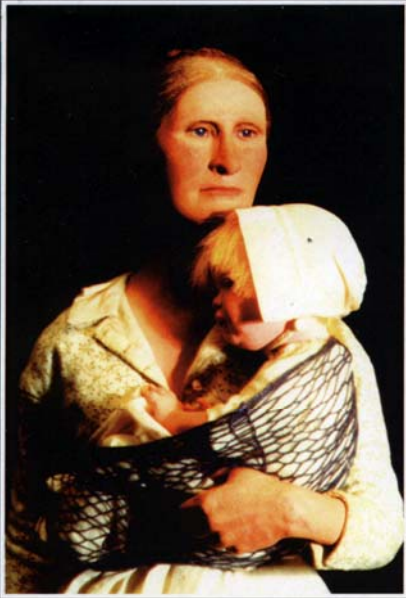
"Ecstasy", dancing woman (Middle East) Delicate jewelry & ornamentation by the artist. Private Collection.



Hagen & Gunther characters from the Germanic legend: "Das Nibelungenlied". Pre-Christian Warrior dress & ornamentation. Artist's collection

intricate piece that, if he were to complete himself, it would take a year. It is simply a time saver. Stuart believes in being able to do virtually all the crafts he includes in the production of the Figures; but due to the multiplicity of skills needed it would take forever in some cases, and of course there are things he cannot do such as Chinese embroidery or weaving. Nevertheless, he designs each and every item and closely supervises the production.

Mr. Stuart says the small scale figurative sculpture field has been a difficult one to establish as a "fine art". There are a handful of artists whose work is of such a caliber as to be classified as a fine art, but only a few. That isn't to say that there aren't a great number of really gifted and talented artists working in a figurative medium. However Stuart finds it disheartening that so many of them find their inspiration in childlike fantasy or caricature, even though that is what attracted them in the first place. Unfortunately that image does not attract gallery owners or serious fine arts collectors.



"Nancy Kelsey" c.1841. First non-Indian woman to cross the Sierra Mountains of California. She holds her daughter Anne. Artist's collection.

Stuart feels that as we live in the age of the ugly and grotesque, where no creative effort is viewed as "serious" and everything has a sneering humor attached to it, that perhaps the fantasists and contrivers of the grotesque have a better chance at gaining notice than do those artists who see life in more literal terms. Regardless, Stuart says, with all the horrific ugliness that pervades our obscenely overpopulated world, he believes that the genuine beauty and interest still lies with "actuality" in portraiture. That is where his creative instincts have always taken him.

Fred Kidder



"Marie de Medici", Queen of France c.1600. Consort of Henry IV founder of the Bourbon Dynasty. Her coronation robes were encrusted with gems set in gold. All produced by the Artist. Artist's collection.



"Queen Uta" a character from the Germanic legend "Das Nibelungenlied". Specially woven wool garments are set off with heavy embroidery and jewelry. The drinking cup of horn is set with silver. Artist's collection.



"Etzil" a character from the German Legend "Das Nibelungenlied". Closeup of details showing artist's silver work & woodcarving. Artist's collection.

HOW THE MODELS ARE MADE

George Stuart uses a technique that could be regarded as a modification of the standard building procedure used in the creation of life-size historical figures in museums. He begins with extended research on the subject during which time he learns as much as possible about personal features of the eventual character, then he makes a wire articulated skeleton on which body shape is modelled with successive layers of a substance similar to papier mache. Next, fleshy parts are padded with a kind of cotton wool to render smooth final surfaces.

Heads are made separately beginning with a skull on which the face is modelled with clay. When likeness is perfect a plastic mould of the face is made. A jeweler's loup and fine instruments are used to refine and detail this mould from the inside. The skull with the eyes is embedded into the mould covered with a special clay. Talcum is used to prevent the clay from sticking to the mould and once the assembly is pulled out, Stuart starts working on finishing the face and specially the rear part of the head till completing the desired shape. Usually ears are standard cast pieces, sort of a shortcut.



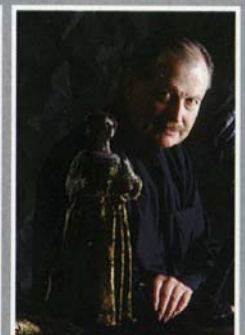
*"Lakota Sioux Warrior" c.1830s.
A challenge of engineering for the
artist. Artist's collection.*



*"The Salute" Crow Warrior c.1870.
The eagle feather bonnet was typical as were
the intricate "quill work" embellishments on
his buckskin leggings. Artist's collection.*

Next step is to bake the head at low temperature for several hours and eventual flaws appearing during this process are amended. The hair -sheep skin- is then added to the hardened skull. The scalp is cut to measure on the skull and set on with a plastic adhesive thus becoming an integral part of the head. Even smaller details as the fingernails are object of careful treatment using fine-grade white silk taffeta soaked in polymer glue and fixed to the tip of the fingers.

The skin is finished by means of the addition of several layers of paint and the garments, jewelry, weapon or accompanying furniture made separately and often treated with quite similar procedures as the ones used in making the real thing.



www.galleryhistoricalfigures.com