

Il Museo della Bambola e del Giocattolo Collezione Borromeo

(The Museum of Dolls and Toys of the Borromeo Collection)

by Lynn Murray

One cannot visit Northern Italy's Lake Maggiore without being profoundly aware of the Dynasty of the Borromeo family. Admiring the vista from the summit of Mount Mottarone, it is easy to pick out the jewels in the crown. The Borromeo Islands and the Fortress across the lake at Angera, stand regally reminding us of their aristocratic past.

The family has been powerful and influential in the region for seven hundred years. Perhaps the most famous of the ancestors is San Carlo Borromeo, born in 1538. He was the Cardinal Archbishop of Milan and considered to be one of the great reformers of the sixteenth century. As the Patron Saint of the lake, his statue towers over the town of Arona on the southern shore. He is the same San Carlo for whom the Mission San Carlo Borromeo in Carmel, California is named.

In the fifteenth century, Vitaliano I, who was Treasurer to the Duke of Milan, acquired enormous tracts of land surrounding Lake Maggiore leading to the establishment of the Borromeo State. The strategic location between the Alps and Lombardy gave the dynasty even greater influence. The Borromeo legacy grew in strength not through military might, but through savvy business practices, discretion and diplomacy.

Caring for and maintaining such a legacy remains a full-time occupation. Fortunately the current family members have been raised and educated with a strong desire to preserve the art and history that is pertinent to not only the family Borromeo, but to historians and collectors.

In regards to protection, preservation and collection, the Principessa Bona Borromeo Arese takes the family lead. When she



Arranged chronologically, the dolls and toys are displayed in glass cases through twelve rooms in the fortress.



Massive early paintings share the fortress rooms.



In every room there are large photographs of children contemporary to the dolls and toys in that room.



Paintings and photographs collected by the Principessa Bona Borromeo complement her doll collection while illustrating vignettes of childhood life from the 18th century to modern day.



The Japanese dolls that were exhibited at the Paris Exposition in 1855 became popular in Europe. The museum has an exceptional collection of these early dolls.



Views of the Fortress Rocco Angera.

became part of the family as a bride, she was filled with enthusiasm for renovating the palaces and gardens and restoring the collections of art and furniture, artifacts and treasures that were in disrepair. The eldest son of Principessa Bona Borromeo and Principe Gilberto VIII, Count Vitaliano XI, shares the role of estate management with his Mother. His younger brother, Frederico X, is engaged in business and industry with his Father. The family has adapted their summer residence to accommodate the crowds of tourists on their island. In fact, they regard the crowds as a sign of success, for it is the preservation of the legacy for the public that motivates the family Borromeo.

The Principessa is a self-confessed collector. In 1988 the Museo della Bambola e del Giocattolo Collezione Borromeo (The Museum of Dolls and Toys) was founded.



Views from the fortress to Lake Maggiore below. (LM photo)



38cm Jumeau "Bébé Incassable" with marked Jumeau body, ca. 1878.



85cm Bébé Bru, size 11 holding a large *Polichinelle* with F.G. head. For the doll scholar, there is a very interesting assortment of Bru bodies with various heads in the case with this spectacular Bébé.



40cm composition doll by Burgarella of Rome, circa 1925. All original, in original box. Seldom seen in North America, the museum has quite a comprehensive and very appealing selection of these Italian-made dolls with their unique body jointing and skillfully modeled and painted features.



Automaton of clown acrobats, French, ca. 1890.



From the Music collection, an automaton of a Jumeau lady playing the piano.



60cm automaton gentleman with spy glass by Lambert, France, ca. 1890



45cm Huret fashion with jointed neck and wooden body, ca. 1868, standing with a marked Huret chair.



68cm Spanish Lady by Lenci, offered in the 1926 catalogue (#163). Her original costume bears the cloth label "Lenci Made in Italy." The company was founded in nearby Turin and Madam Scavini had her shop in Milan. Considering the region, the museum collection is surprisingly modest in its examples of Lenci and other fine Italian cloth dolls.



85cm Jumeau B    known as the Jumeau *Triste*. This size 16 example came from a Florentine family, dressed for Summer as she is, with her provenance. Ca.1879.



Famous Vichy automaton of Polichinelle serenading the moon.



56cm automaton "Turkish Smoker" by Lambert, France, ca. 1890.



40cm Bru Jne twins, size 4 marked heads and shoes, wearing original sailor costumes. Ca. 1885. (LM photo)



50cm English poured wax Pierroti-type dressed to represent Queen Victoria. (LM photo)



44cm English Pierotti-type poured wax doll with cloth body, in original 1st Communion gown, ca. 1890.

Originally on Isola Madre, the museum was relocated to its current home in the fortress, Rocco Angera, where the dolls and toys could be showcased to greater advantage. In twelve grand rooms of the fortress more than 1400 dolls are displayed encased in modern glass cases. The chronological arrangement of the dolls and playthings is done to intentionally relate doll-making to historic and industrial changes between the 17th Century and the 21st Century. Yet belying this calculated scholastic approach, there are vignettes of dolls with accessories, beloved teddies, toys spilling out of boxes and Schoenhut circus characters performing with joyful abandon. Fine miniature furniture, board games and ephemera intrigue visitors who are new to the world of playthings.

In addition to the Borromeo Collection, a spectacular collection of French and German automata is now housed in the fortress museum. Collected by Robert Peschè and Gisele Brault Peschè of Tours, France, the automata are divided into three groups: Music, the Circus and Vices and Virtues. A video screen that shows the pieces in sound and motion accompanies each case of automata.

The collection continues to evolve and grow through purchases and donations, ensuring that the museum will continue to attract visitors in the future. Having made three visits in the last year, the author highly recommends a visit to Rocco Angera. To enhance your visit, there is a comprehensive museum guide available in Italian and English, listing the identities of the dolls and toys and in the case of gifts, the names of donors.

For information on future tours or for a virtual visit of this most important doll and toy museum, go to: www.tlcdolltours.com



Large and very fine 18th century 70cm crèche figure representing Christ. (LM photo)



48cm Simon & Halbig character with intaglio eyes and open/closed mouth with painted teeth, marked only S&H//2 (LM photo)



Early unmarked Steiner bébé with bisque hips, lower legs and lower arms. (LM photo)



47cm papier mâché lady with leather body and wooden limbs. Made in Germany, ca. 1820, this spectacular doll is made unusual by her ornate hairstyle, the quality of the painting and the addition of the painted pearl tiara. (LM photo)



One of the most appealing faces in the museum is this large early French poupée, possibly Barrois, dressed as a child. (LM photo)



46cm poupée, the so-called Smiling Bru. (LM photo)

Photos courtesy of Il Museo della Bambola e del Giocattolo unless otherwise noted.