



Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at her Coronation in 1953.



Coldstream Guards officer.



Michael Suttty's Latham Centrepiece depicts British Lt. Matthew Latham and Ensign Charles Walsh of the East Kent Regiment ("The Buffs") defending the King's colour against Polish lancers during the Battle of Albuera in Spain May 16, 1811. This dramatic piece was in the collection of Dame Margaret Thatcher. It sold for £17,500 in a Christie's auction Dec. 15, 2015.

Staffordshire Figures Sculpted by Suttty

James H. Hillestad describes the work Michael Suttty, one of the world's foremost sculptors of Staffordshire-style, bone china military figurines

TEXT AND PHOTOS: JAMES H. HILLESTAD

Born in 1937, sculptor Michael Suttty began his lifelong work in an English country home in Kent. As a budding artist, he subsequently moved to Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, a city known for its pottery industry. To save money, he slept on the floor of his studio.

As Suttty's output grew, he opened a gallery in London's posh Burlington Arcade to showcase his work.

CHINA ACHIEVEMENTS

Suttty's reputation stems mainly from limited editions of bone china regi-

mental figures whose uniforms were painstakingly researched and accurate in every minute detail.

Virtually every royal household in Britain boasts at least one Suttty piece. His work is sought after by serious collectors throughout the world.

Suttty created figures so complex and technically demanding that they have been described as "unmakeable."

Lady Margaret Baroness Thatcher, who served as British prime minister from 1979 to 1990, referred to Suttty's sculptures as "works of genius."



Indian Army mounted 18th Bengal Lancers officer and a Skinner's Horse officer, 1920.

The Times of London called Suttly "the finest sculptor of military figures in the world."

STAFFORDSHIRE TRADITION

It was my very good fortune to meet Suttly in 1994. That meeting turned into a lasting friendship.

As a robustly independent English artist, it was Suttly's mission to restore the proud tradition of Staffordshire bone china sculpture. In production since at least the 1700s, Staffordshire bone china had begun to lose its way artistically, sacrificing art to the constraints of mass production.

Why bone china?

Suttly preferred to work in the more "natural" — and more difficult — medium of bone china rather than in porcelain. During numerous high-temperature firings, the danger of ruining the sculpting was ever-present. Yet those firings were essential for the china, glaze, enamel colors, and 22-carat gold luster all to become



Lord Viscount Nelson, 1805.



Indian Army 14th Bengal Lancers officer, 1890.

intimately bonded together to create the translucent, vitrified finish which characterizes a Suttu sculpture.

PRODUCTION PROCESS

The original sculpture would be created by Suttu in red clay, then cut into pieces from which molds of all the parts were made. Liquid bone china was poured into the molds. After several minutes, the molds were carefully eased apart and the jigsaw parts reunited to form the piece. In the case of the designer's Latham Centrepiece, for example, 52 pieces were required.

The model was then placed in a kiln under strict temperature controls and fired to the bisque stage. It was then ready for painting.

No transfers (decals) were used. Every brushstroke was hand-painted by artists. The model then underwent three to eight firings because different colors have different temperature requirements.

The whole process of making bone china enables the glaze and enamels to merge with the body of the piece and form an absolutely permanent bond which will not fade.

One can take a sharp knife to a Suttu figure and the paint will not be damaged. This cannot be said for porcelain. Its decorations can fade in sunlight and wear away with handling.

It is my privilege to have more than 40 of Michael Suttu's figures in The Toy Soldier Museum.

COUPLE'S PARTNERSHIP

Eve Clark was Suttu's partner for 29 years and played a vital role as the public face of his business. Try as she might, Eve never managed to guide the artist's love for his work and immense talent into the disciplines required for commercial success.

Suttu became ill in 2001 and died Nov. 5, 2003. He was just 66. During his last few months, his long-held wish to marry Eve was fulfilled.

Michael Suttu was a charismatic figure. He was full of humor, with an insatiable appetite for the wonders of life — from good food to a brilliant autumn landscape to a hearty laugh. I remember him as a unique person and a unique talent. ■



Michael Suttu unveiling for the first time his magnificent Lawrence of Arabia at the 1997 East Coast Toy Soldier Show & Sale at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Hackensack, N.J., USA.



"The Trooper's Farewell" — 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards.



ABOUT THE WRITER

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