Our Town

continued from page 14

tures. A piece may lose significance, like a ghost-dance costume discarded after the ceremony and left in the forest to rot. A carving might be rejected by a shaman. Alan Leder, director of the Evanston Art Center, which has included Kolton in its current exhibit, “Hunt & Gather,” dismisses the notion that collectors like Kolton are robbing people of their cultural treasures. “It’s a misperception that tribal cultures are naïve,” he says. “For generations they’ve traded or stored near a cooking fire. Or a piece may have been used in a firelit ritual ‘For instance, if it smells of smoke, it’s actually used.’ Determining whether a piece was actually used is challenging, he says. “For instance, if it smells of smoke, it may have been used in a firelit ritual or stored near a cooking fire. Or a clever counterfeiter could have held it over an open flame to give it the instant patination.”

Kolton’s collection can be seen online (tribalartworks.com) and at his home showroom by appointment. He’s exhibited at university museums and has been included in “The Gods as We Shape Them” at the Loyola University Museum of Art. He’ll also be part of a group show at Purdue University museum-quality as older than 50 years, with known provenance and most likely not reproducible. “Almost all artifacts of this quality are already in museums or a few private collections,” he says. “Collectible works are made in the last 50 years for tribal use, and actually used. They display excellent craftsmanship, but they could be reproduced since there are still many skillful artisans.”

Kolton, 36, only started sewing teddy bears in 2003, but among collectors—known as arctophiles—she’s already a minor celebrity. Working on bear making, and she was the subject of a March cover story in the Handcrafted teddy bears have a unique style she describes as “tradi-
ture teddy bear,’ and then I realized the ‘intimacy of the scale’ of small Native American animal carvings. ‘I’ll be ready in a year or two, maybe for my 68th birthday,’ he says. ‘I guess I’ll just keep this up till the supply of artifacts gives out—or I do. Whichever comes first.’

Entrepreneurs

Smarter Than the Average Bear

Patricia Klayman’s weird-looking little teddies are a hit with collectors.

By Heather Kenny

“I’ve been subjec ted to years of kisses and smushing. That’s one of Klayman’s trademarks. ‘A lot of those antique bears are pretty quirky,’ she says. ‘They get so funny after years and years—the arms, the nose, the eyes—all of a sudden you notice how they get all worn. That way they’re not so precious.’”

Klayman, 36, started a Yahoo discussion group devoted to her work and at least one has a Peng Peng tattoo. A graduate of the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia, Klayman moved to Chicago about ten years ago to get into the music scene. She spent sever-

Yes, there is a difference. Illinois’ most conservative Democrat in Congress (suburbanite Melissa Bean) is more liberal than 59 percent of her colleagues in the National Journal’s 2005 vote ratings, while our most liberal Republican (suburbanite Mark Kirk) is more liberal than 49 percent. –HM
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fibers. In the 1970s an American doll produced versions made with synthetic were rapidly replaced by mass-produced bears. Many artist bears are traditional, dressed in doll clothes, but there are also knitted bears, miniature bears only a couple inches tall, and monsterlike “goth” bears. You can even have a bear made from the clothing of a deceased loved one. There are teddy bear museums in England and Florida, teddy bear magazines, and teddy bear trade shows where artists and collectors regularly meet up. Klayman insists that collectors aren’t all middle-aged women in teddy bear sweatshirts. “That’s like saying all Star Trek fans are Trekkees—it’s sort of degrading,” she says. “I’ve seen everything from western ladies—it’s a whole variety.”

Although she’d never taken a needle to anything other than the occasional button or patch, Klayman found a pattern on the Web and made her own tiny bear out of some wool she had lying around. “It was really crude,” she says. Soon afterward she bought a how-to book and started learning different stitches. The first bear she sold—a tradition-al-looking mini bear named Charles, after her brother—went for $20 on eBay. Making miniature bears was an obsession for a while. “My smallest one was under two inches,” she says. “It becomes a sick perversion—how small can I go?” But she soon invested in a sewing machine, a metal 50s sewing machine, a metal 50s table, and bought special hand-dyed mohair that isn’t available in any other store. For inspiration she mined Japanese craft books and anime. Peng Peng Bears took off quickly. In a January 2005 article Teddy Bear Scene noted that Klayman’s art background had helped her to be “successful from the beginning—something that doesn’t happen to many bear artists.” Her creations are sold through her Web site, peng-peng.com, and a few well-respected teddy bear artists.” Her creations are sold through her Web site, peng-peng.com, and a few well-respected teddy bear artists. With one series of bears she incorporated the “characteristic grin and bulbous eyes” of a famous bear from 1915, Chittern’s, and one woman I know, she makes four a day. “I don’t have stock lying around,” she says. “[The business is] a machine, a factory, a factory, a factory,” she says. “This one woman, I know, makes four a day. I want to know what kind of coffee she’s drinking, because I can’t possibly make them that fast.” Last year Klayman introduced a line of sock monkeys, made from vintage red-heeled socks she finds on eBay and then “antiques” using a secret method. They now account for 30 percent of her sales.

Like a lot of small-business owners, Klayman finds that paperwork is one of the biggest hurdles. “It’s another thing to take someone’s influences from the get-go. It’s another thing to take someone’s influences from the get-go. It’s another thing to take someone’s influences from the get-go.” But it’s one thing to be influenced and disclose your influences from the get-go. It’s another thing to take someone’s influences from the get-go. It’s another thing to take someone’s influences from the get-go. “I don’t want to knock other people—sometimes your stuff can look like somebody else’s work,” she says. “But it’s one thing to be influenced and disclose your influences from the get-go.”

Another challenge is keeping her designs fresh. With one series of bears she incorporated the “characteristic grin and bulbous eyes” of a girl she knew who was doing the same thing. She says, “I want to know what kind of coffee she’s drinking, because I can’t possibly make them that fast.” Last year Klayman introduced a line of sock monkeys, made from vintage red-heeled socks she finds on eBay and then “antiques” using a secret method. They now account for 30 percent of her sales.

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