

Narberth Dollmaker Specializes In Unique Gifts

By LINDA DORMONT
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Born in Paris in 1940, Maya Chabrol Starr of Narberth has been a commercial artist for magazines, a silk-screen artisan, a children's book illustrator and a fine artist whose paintings are still exhibited on two continents.

Now she has a new profession: dollmaker.

Her first original doll collection — for sale to the public at Earthworks in Narberth, the Langman Gallery in Willow Grove Park and The Artisans at Liberty Place in Philadelphia — are the country folk of her childhood.

Dressed in hand-made authentic costumes, these molded-clay and

fabric dolls are fishermen, shepherds, wood-gatherers, market women and other types from not-so-long-ago.

The women have long skirts and scarves tied peasant-style around their heads. The men wear working clothes, with hand-crocheted hats and shoulderbags. All are posed as if caught in the midst of a busy day.

What makes these dolls most original is their meticulously hand-painted faces. Starr uses her remarkable memory plus family albums to recreate her forebears.

"These are the faces of my grandmother, my mother and the people of my ancestral village," she says. "I have frozen the past for others to enjoy."

Her father's family came from Nimes, the south of France. Her mother's family lived in the Valle D'Aoste, the Alpine region of northwestern Italy, where they

tended farms and vineyards.

The artist herself has resided in the United States since 1967, when she married Dr. Stuart Starr, a professor in the pediatric depart-

ment of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School.

"People everywhere have a common history in the countryside," she says. "Every family



DOLLMAKER MAYA STARR of Narberth poses with her first original collection of "country folk" dolls, which reach back to her ancestry in Europe. Born in Paris, she is currently working on a new doll collection with an American Ancestry theme. Her dolls are available at Earthworks in Narberth as well as the Artisans in Liberty Place in Philadelphia and Langman Gallery in Willow Grove Park.

who came to this country had some ancestors similar to mine: hard-working people who lived in small villages or towns and gathered their sustenance from the land. I want people to look at my dolls and remember their own histories."

Working with her assistant, Dale Compson, she plans each doll with loving care, sketching clothing and faces before any work is done. The working period can be hours or days. Each part of the doll is made

separately, then hand-stitched together. Each face is an individual portrait that glows with life.

Her dolls, which range in size from nine to 10 inches, are sometimes posed in family groupings, complete with pets and farm animals. Like her paintings, her dolls are a celebration of life's natural bounty and capacity for regeneration.

Starr is currently working on her "American Ancestors" collection:

dolls representing the heroes and folk of Early American history.

"Photographs of 18th-century Americans are not available," she explains. "I use old paintings to find historically true costumes and faces. I want to link Americans of the present to their historical past which I shall recreate as a three-dimensional story."

The dolls of Maya Starr's collection range in price from \$65 to \$80.