

# Restoring An Antique Bru

*Restoring Mildred Seeley's  
Antique Bru Jne 3*

*by Darlene Lane*

In my hands lay an Antique Bru, an absolutely thrilling experience. This little Bru on a leather body belonged to Mildred Seeley and I had been asked to replace the head and one missing arm. The question was could I really accomplish what needed to be done.

## *Evaluation*

The first task was to find a mold for the head in the correct size. The head was marked Bru Jne 3 so a Bru Jne 4 mold should reduce in a high fire to the right size. The Bru Jne 4 by Jean Nordquist was in my inventory of molds but what about the missing arm? The remaining arm was unusual in its size. None of my arm molds matched in both hand size and arm length. If the hands matched the original in size the arm was too long, and if the arm length was correct the hand was too small. What was needed was the shorter arm connected to the larger hand. Could this be done? I decided to give it a try.

After removing the arm from the mold I cut away a section just below the elbow. Using a soft brush and porcelain slip I spliced two pieces back together. Then I pierced a hole through the elbow hoping this would allow the lower arm to be attached to the upper arm in the right position. This was guesswork because of the shrinkage involved in the high fire. In the end it was amazingly accurate.

## *Improvisation*

Still missing, however, was the upper arm assembly. After locating a pattern, I reduced it on the copy machine hoping again that it was the right size. I enlisted the help of my husband Tom to do the hard part. He fashioned the upper arm assembly out of a piece of sheet metal wrapped around a



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wooden dowel. One end of the arm connected to the lower arm through the hole I had punched in the porcelain arm. The other end of the upper arm connected to a wooden bead which pivoted in the shoulder-plate hole. This upper arm assembly was then covered



with leather, like the original.

Now came the scary part -- the removal of the shoulder-plate from the leather body. After removing the slender two inch long nails, it wouldn't budge. It was then that I discovered that not only was it held in place with four long nails, but there was a generous amount of glue holding it firmly to the body. Even after more than one hundred years the glue held tight!



#### Determination

The thought kept running through my brain, I can't do this. What if I break it? Mrs. Seeley assured me over the phone several times that I could do it. It would come off. With renewed faith and a prayer and several more prayers, I gently rocked the shoulder-plate back and forth. This effort took over an hour before it finally came

loose and I was able to gently ease the shoulder-plate away from the body. The rebuilt arm was then fastened to the shoulder-plate through the wooden bead using a screw and wood block like the original.

Using the original connecting parts, the old broken head was replaced with the new one that I had painted. The photo shows the many pieces that were removed in order to replace the head. The reference ruler is six inches in length.



#### Completion

I finally breathed a long sigh of relief when I replaced her missing mohair wig and then returned her to Mrs. Seeley. Relief because the job was accomplished without damaging the doll any further. I also felt gratitude because I had been entrusted with this project. In another publication, an article by Colleen Seeley wrote an article about this little Bru and the value of antique reproductions. The doll now stands next to her original Bru sisters in Mildred Seeley's wonderful antique doll collection. ♥

# How to Increase the Value of Your Antique Doll Reproductions

By Colleen Seeley



I am a Bru Jne 8

I am a Bru Jne 3

I am a Bru Jne 1

I am a Bru Jne 4

I am a Bru Jne 5

One of these dolls is not telling the truth. Can you tell which one?

Clue: She has brown paperweight eyes.

Clue: She is on an old leather body with one reproduction bisque arm.

Clue: She was made from a Bru Jne 5 reproduction mold.

Will the reproduction Bru please step forward?

# 10 Guidelines for Making & Selling Authentic Reproductions

**I**n the art world, there are many examples of known reproductions fetching prices nearly as high as the original piece of art. The reason? Some reproductions are so exact in every way that even the best of the art dealers can't tell.

"The value of reproduction art is increasing. They may be fakes, but [they] can also be valuable."

*Forbes Magazine*

## Enjoyment of the Art

The fact that collectors enjoy having the art without the high investment value, combined with a new level of acceptability for the reproduction, has increased the demand for quality reproductions in recent years. And for those pieces of art that are nearly indistinguishable from the real McCoy, both demand and prices are soaring.

What implications does this have for the antique reproduction doll? We know that prices are driven by supply and demand and that the price of antique dolls has been on a steady rise over the past several decades. There are more doll collectors everyday yet fewer and fewer antique dolls to go around because they deteriorate or break. Thus, for collectors of the fabulous old French and German dolls sometimes the only affordable or available alternative is the reproduction doll.

## Modern Dolls

But what about making dolls for the modern doll collectors? Just as art collectors may invest in the works of modern day artists in hopes they will become recognized and thus increase the value of their work at a later date, some doll collectors do invest in original artists dolls. Some are sold as limited editions, others as one of a kind artists' originals. One can certainly not discount the enjoyment factor among collectors who appreciate the fine workmanship and appeal of many of these modern dolls.

10 *Doll Artisan*

Yet from an investment point of view, these dolls are a gamble. The parallel can once again be drawn to the art world where the works of the old masters are known to be a solid investment.



*Surprised that this beautiful Bru is a reproduction? She is a quality and authentic reproduction of a Bru Jne 5 (appearing to be a Bru Jne 3 on the previous page) made by Darlene Lane of Tucson, Arizona.*

I have been around dolls of all kinds my entire life, as my mother has collected dolls for over 50 years. Until recently, neither of us had ever seen an antique reproduction doll we couldn't spot. The reproduction that finally fooled us, made for my mother by Darlene Lane of Tucson, Arizona, now resides proudly at Shandele with her authentic Bru companions. The current going auction price of a similar size original Bru Jne Béb  is \$16-18,000.

What would the value of this doll be at auction? Unknown. But in my mother's word the value:

*"Is priceless. This doll represents everything I've been trying to teach for the past 50 years. If you want to be creative, make your own doll. If you want to replicate the work of the old masters learn everything you can about the original doll and her maker then make your doll authentic down to the last detail. This doll matches the quality and aura of my antique Brus in every way and makes a fine addition to my collection."*

~ Mildred Seeley

It is perhaps the aura of a doll that is more than 100 years old that attracts so many people to antique dolls. While the doll's rarity and quality of workmanship play an important part in determining value, it is ultimately the doll's overall aura that determines her selling price. Recreating this aura is one of the most important, yet frequently lacking, elements in antique doll reproduction today.

If you want to sell authentic antique reproduction dolls to antique doll collectors your dolls must achieve this aura, or they stick out like a sore thumb in a collection. How can a reproduction artist achieve this special aura? The 10 guidelines below help.

## 1 Know the doll you are replicating

Getting to know a doll is like getting to know a person. Each of us has our own personal history that not only makes us unique, but makes us who we are today. The more you know about the doll you are replicating the more exact your depiction will be.

• *Know when she was made.* What was

# 10 Guidelines for Making & Selling Authentic Reproductions

the standard of doll making at the time?

- *Know how she was made.* Was she made of poured or pressed porcelain, how was she tinted or blushed, what types of brush strokes were used?
- *Know where she was made and by whom.* At whose porcelain factory was the bisque made, who made the eyes, who decorated her, where was she assembled, who made the body, where was she costumed?
- *Know why she was made.* Was she made as a toy, a fashion courier, a lap doll? Was the original model sculpted to look like someone? Was she designed for an automaton maker, a department store or to compete in a new market? Was she mass produced for export or made only in limited quantities on special order?

## 2 Know the value of the doll you are replicating and price your reproductions proportionate to the price of the originals

If you are replicating a rare antique doll with a value of \$30,000, you can expect more for an authentic reproduction than you would most likely get from a reproduction of a lesser priced or more common antique doll. The reason is simple. Supply and demand. Why pay \$2500 for a reproduction of a fashion poupée (no matter how good the quality), when you can buy the real thing at the same price? Dolls such as Bru Jnes, Delcroixs, Halapeaus, Thuilliers, Schmitts, Bébé Tristes, and several others demand much higher prices.

## 3 Know in what sizes the original doll was made

For some dolls, such as the Marque, the



Four Bru Jne Bébés displayed in the Mildred Seeley antique doll collection. The smallest one is a reproduction. The other three include a 19" Bru Jne 8, a 16" Bru Jne 5, and a 15" Bru Jne 4.

size of the doll can be a telltale reproduction sign. This is because the original dolls were only made in one size. Unless you have a mold that has been enlarged, your reproduction will be about 13-15% smaller than the original. For a French doll this usually represents a drop in two doll sizes from the original. The early French dolls were made with pressed porcelain that had a shrinkage rate of about 7½ percent. Thus, each doll size drops at about this rate. Most of today's poured porcelain results in a reduction twice this much.

For dolls that were made in several sizes, such as the Bru Jne, a shrunken reproduction of a Bru Jne 5 will simply look like a Bru Jne 3 and will not be distinguishable as a reproduction simply due to size. Because the price of your reproductions should reflect the overall authentic appearance of the



Using most porcelain slip available on today's market, a 16" Bru Jne 5 will reproduce to the size of a 14" Bru Jne 3. When the doll was originally made with pressed porcelain, a size 5 reproduced to the next smaller size 4. This is how subsequent reductions in sizes were made in 1883. Today's porcelain has about twice the shrinkage rate of the old pressed porcelain. Thus in order to make a reproduction in a size that would have originally been produced, you need to start with a mold of a doll at least two sizes larger than the size produced in the 1800s.

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doll, you should not expect to get an equivalent price for a doll that is made in a size different than the original model.

## 4 Paint right

Don't decide the doll would look better with more or less blush, or matching eyebrows, or different stroke lashes. The model you are recreating has withstood the test of time without losing her appeal. It is this original appeal – not a reinterpreted one – that you must copy in order to attract the interest of serious antique doll collectors.

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*When standing side by side, an authentic reproduction should be indistinguishable from an original.*

## 5 Use the appropriate eyes

Part of Emile Jumeau's success was achieved by using what he termed the new "human" paperweight eyes made by Guepratte. Using anything other than these old French paperweight glass eyes (or their equivalent) will distort the appearance of any EJ or B  b   Triste and detract from her authenticity. Also, make sure the color is right, as certain makers used only limited eye colors (never green). Think of the eyes as a window to the doll's soul. If the eyes are wrong, the doll's aura will be wrong.

## 6 Use the right material, size, style and color for the doll's wig

The overall appeal of a doll often has as much to do with her wig as it does with her face and costume. Using the wrong

wig can greatly detract from the doll's facial beauty and make her look harsh or sickly. Using the right wig can transform her whole personality.

It is essential for the wig to be in a style that enhances the doll's face and that it be made of the proper material for the time. Mohair is appropriate for most French dolls, as mohair wigs curl softly around a doll's face giving her the soft and angelic look of a child. The wig must also be of a color that either enhances or coordinates well with the color of her eyes, the tinting of her bisque and the color of her costume.

## 7 Use the right body

Research body types. Was the original doll sold on a composition, leather or wood body? If it was leather with bisque arms find an authentic old body (with a missing or broken head) that is the right size and repair it. Or create a body by using the appropriate leather body pattern and reproduction bisque arms. Be sure to put Bru arms on Brus, and Thuillier arms on ATs, etc. If the original body was composition, use the correct body shape with the correct number and types of body joints. Just like antique dolls, reproductions will sell better if they are on appropriate bodies, and even better if they are on original bodies.

## 8 Present the doll the way she would have been presented at the time she was originally sold

Research the costumes including underwear, hats, boots, shoes, socks and accessories that came with the doll. To the extent possible, reproduce it all. Some dolls came in trunks with complete wardrobes, some came in presentation boxes, some wore ribbon banners and some were sold in simple chemises.

If possible, use appropriate antique dresses. Antique christening dresses work great for the French B  b  s or create a reproduction costume from antique materials. If you must use new fabric, use natural fiber materials such as cotton, linen, and wool. Stay away from polyesters and other synthetic fabrics that were not in use at the time the original doll was made.

## 9 Target antique doll collectors and price your reproductions based upon the supply of similar works of art

Know the supply of both the original doll and similar reproduction dolls. If you were the only one with a mold of a particular rare and valuable antique doll, you would obviously have a corner on the reproduction market for that doll. If, however, there are numerous molds and numerous reproductions of the same doll, your edge on the market will be the quality and authenticity of your reproductions.

Modern doll collectors are not the ones that will be attracted to your dolls because of their authenticity. Find antique doll collectors at auctions, through ads in trade magazines and newspapers, through antique doll shops, and through doll clubs.

## 10 Sign your work on the back of the doll's head and become known for your fine reproductions

Never try to pass your reproduction doll off as an original. Be sure to sign your name and clearly identify the doll as your work. If your work is good enough, it then becomes your name and reputation that sells your dolls.

If you follow all 10 guidelines your reproduction doll will be well on the way to holding her own in the company of her older antique friends. And, in a high demand low supply antique market, the right reproduction doll could be a big winner.<sup>DA</sup>