

to a toy-making family. Both his father and grandfather made wooden dolls, rocking horses, and wagons.¹ From a very young age, Albert was immersed in the toy-making business and was surrounded by the abilities and craftsmanship of great German producers. Albert began making toys with astonishing expertise in his home, which eventually led to his immigration to America.

The Decorative Arts Museum contains eight of the original individual pieces from various sets.⁴ The first four of these items are various figures one might see at the circus—all painted, smiling, and standing proud. The first piece in this collection is an 8-inch circus clown; he is wearing a once brightly colored white and red striped outfit with gigantic red shoes. Obviously worn, the condition of this clown is understandable because a clown like this was probably among the first dolls made for the Circus and was patented in 1903. Other dolls included the Ringmaster, Lion Tamer, Gent and Lady Acrobats, and Lady Circus Rider. Many of these original pieces are difficult to come across, and an original piece such as this is a rare find; this happy clown is arguably the most valuable collectable on hand.

Chipped and missing some paint, the next piece in the set is a 6-inch male doll (circa 1910); this is the “Ringmaster” of the Circus. With his red vest, khaki stockings, and tall black socks, he is displayed standing apart from the rest of the group as though he is announcing what is occurring to the rest of the crowd. The other male doll, known to have been circulating in 1925, is a 7.5-inch clown. This reduced-

spectacular condition for its age. The friendly tiger is positioned on its hind legs as though he is about to do some sort of trick or perhaps pounce.

The Decorative Arts Museum also contains four of the accessories/equipment for the Schoenhut's Circus. Each of these pieces was a part of an original set dating back to 1910. The smaller clown climbs on a simple, white, 12-inch wooden ladder. At the same time, this clown throws an extremely plain, 4-inch diameter, red, wooden hoop into the air. Beside it, the previously mentioned "Ringmaster" stands upon a tan 5-inch wooden chair. Finally, a safe distance away lies the 3.75-inch tall pedestal, which is painted a bright yellow with blue and green trim; this is what the tiger's front legs rest upon. All of the extra circus equipment simply adds to the delight, excitement, imagination, and authenticity of the overall experience.

Manufactured toys have been around for decades, but the unique touch of Albert Schoenhut makes him one of the most impressive of the first American toy-makers. His Humpty Dumpty Circus is a classic set of figurines and accessories which draws the participant into the exciting and blissful scene of the circus coming to town. For collectors today, this set is an extremely valuable find; in the early 1900s, these circus toys were a step into the imagination. The eight pieces of Schoenhut's Circus that the Decorative Arts Museum contains, whether in tattered or immaculate condition, draw the visitor's attention and imagination into a vivid reality that Albert made more than one hundred years ago with simple wood and paint.

Works Cited

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