

# The Art of Restoration

Why learn to love a broken figurine, when you can fix it!

*M.I. Hummel* figurines can be seen everywhere in various stages of completion. There are ceramic materials, glazes, paints, and brushes in a well-organized array. A row of kilns lines the back wall. Craftspersons are hard at work.

It may sound a bit like the Goebel factory in Rodental, Germany. But this is actually the studio of Ceramic Restorations of Westchester, on the banks of the Hudson River, about an hour north of New York City.

## A Master Artist at work in America

The studio is operated by Hans Schindhelm, former Goebel Master Painter and graduate of the renowned Goebel Apprentice Program. Hans tells us he became an apprentice as a 17-year-old in Germany, studying ceramic painting, and later graduating from a masters program. According to Hans, he worked on the complicated Granget wildlife figurines, *M.I. Hummel*, *Chariot Byj*, and over 60 Goebel product lines. Hans participated in the traveling artist program, touring Europe and North America to demonstrate the fine art of creating *M.I. Hummel* figurines.

On a 1984 tour to America with the Goebel facsimile factory, Hans met his wife-to-be, the North American coordinator of the traveling artist program. Two years later Hans married, moved permanently to Westchester County, New York and opened Ceramic Restorations. He's been lovingly repairing *M.I. Hummel* figurines and other sculptural treasures ever since.

## The painstaking process

It begins with a careful damage assessment and an estimate of the repair cost. Then the owner decides whether or not to proceed. Costs are based, not on the value of the figurine, but rather on the nature of the damage and the labor and materials required for the repair. The initial step in restoration is cleaning. Many figurines arrive covered with years of grime, which is removed with specialty solvents. Owners may have attempted to repair the figurine at home using plaster, glues, or oil paints. These foreign materials



Before the restoration.

After the restoration.



The broken piece is propped up with clay to hold it in place.

are removed by a firing in one of the studio's four electric kilns.

Pieces that have been broken off are affixed using a mixture of powdered glaze and epoxy. The epoxy serves as a temporary bond only. When the figurine is fired, the epoxy burns off, leaving the melted glaze to permanently fuse the pieces. Any cracks, nicks, and seams are repaired using filler similar to the ceramic material used at Goebel.

Though the material is similar, it cannot be identical. That's because a figurine may not be re-fired at a temperature equal to its original firing temperature, or the paint colors and glazed finish will be altered. Material added during a repair must be a slightly different composition from that used at Goebel, so the repaired figurine can be fired at a lower temperature. After the ceramic filler is applied, the repair is sanded until smooth, so no seams can be seen or felt.

What if a figurine arrives at the studio with pieces not only broken off, but missing altogether? It's a challenging problem, solved in a variety of ways. With luck, a replacement part may be found - the studio actually has boxes of *M.I. Hummel* heads, hands, feet, and the like. If an exact duplicate does not turn up, the missing piece is recreated. It is either re-sculpted "by eye" or re-cast by taking molds from a matching figurine. The studio's skilled sculptors are trained by Hans to perform these tasks.



The painting is done by Hans himself, using points, colors, and techniques similar to those used at Goebel. Hans takes care to precisely match the color and style of the existing paint, so no differences can be detected. The figurine then undergoes a final decor firing just as it would at Goebel, only at a lower temperature so as not to disturb the existing finish.

### To repair or not to repair

Collectors often ask if it's "worth it" to repair a broken piece. Hans' advice: if a repair costs more than one-third the value of the figurine, the repair may not be wise from an investment standpoint. On the other hand, if you adore a piece for sentimental reasons that

go far beyond investment, then by all means, make the repair. Hans does recommend fixing small chips, because any break in the finish can result in dirt and moisture being absorbed, causing further damage to the piece. These simple repairs are usually inexpensive, so for aesthetic reasons plus long term preservation, small nicks should be mended by a skilled restorer.

Hans cautions that restoration takes time. Not only is the process painstaking, but to keep costs down, Hans batches figurines made of similar material when firing up his kilns. A figurine may have to wait awhile for a spot in the kiln. But in most cases, the results are worth the wait.

Go ahead, make the call

To contact Ceramic Restoration of Westchester, call 914-734-8410, fax 914-762-1719, or visit [www.collectorsresources.com](http://www.collectorsresources.com). For a complete, nationwide list of ceramic restorers recommended by M.I. Hummel Club members, call 1-800-666-CLUB (2582).