

For her an apple a day means a new work of art

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN
HARRISBURG — Mary Winsheimer, of Pine Grove, does some amazing things with a golden Delicious apple.

While most of us are satisfied just to sink our teeth into the succulent yellow fruit, she'll work with a single apple for as long as two months to turn it into a unique and beautiful work of art.

A retired art teacher, Mary has carried the centuries-old craft of apple doll making several steps beyond anything the Seneca Indians or pioneer wives ever dreamed of doing.

In her hands, a common ordinary apple fresh off a tree becomes highly artistic figure sculptures, ranging from Jimmy Carter at his desk in the Oval Office or King Henry VIII in full regalia to a pair of elderly matrons making apple butter or an aged farmer in bib overalls showing off his prize pumpkin at the county fair.

Apple dolls are not uncommon in this neck of the woods but Mary's are quite different in many ways.

She applies special treatment to the meat of the apple to preserve its original white coloring and prevent it from turning a discolored brown.

Her figures don't have the customary corn husk dress but are "all dolled up" in authentic handmade costumes, complete with miniature accessories.

These figures are then placed in realistic sculptured settings, which can vary from the Pope giving his papal blessing to a farm wife coring apples or preparing to snap beans.

"I started about seven years ago after retiring as art teacher at the Pine Grove Middle School to help relieve my boredom," Mrs. Winsheimer explains.

"I saw pictures of the traditional apple dolls and hit upon the idea to go a few steps farther and place them

Book-a-mal-doh



Marketing couple stand in front of Mrs. Winsheimer.

in settings, making something pleasant and comical."

Mrs. Winsheimer makes the apple art caricatures based on historical personages or people from real life. Her historical figures, which are researched first, have included Henry VIII and one of his wives, Anne Boleyn, Abe Lincoln, Santa Claus and more contemporary Alfred Hitchcock, Arthur Fiedler, Jimmy Carter and the Pope.

"One of my figures from real life was patterned after an aunt," she said.

"This aunt was about 300 pounds and really filled a bench when she sat down. So that's the figure I made."

Mrs. Winsheimer starts with a golden Delicious apple, as big and as per-

fectly shaped as she can find.

"I like the golden Delicious because of the smooth texture, which makes it easier to paint," she said.

"A big apple is easier to carve and when finished it will shrink down to about a third of its original size."

After the apple is peeled, it is dipped in lemon juice to retard discoloration.

Next a hole is bored up through the center of the apple with an ordinary screwdriver. The core is not removed.

Then, fill the hole with sublime sulphur purchased at a drugstore to prevent rotting during the drying process. Place a pipe cleaner through the hole.

Divide the apple into approximate thirds from top to bottom. Top for forehead, center for nose and cheeks, and bottom for mouth and chin. Leave more space for the feature to be stressed.

Then, carve the face like a block of wood, using a small penknife or even a toothpick for more refined shaping.

Carve the features a bit larger than desired to compensate for the shrinking.

"In carving the face, I try to achieve figures of humorous little people, but I still want them to look like real people," Mrs. Winsheimer explained.

Then, salt is sprinkled over the carved face and brushed with more lemon juice to complete the preservation.

Now, the drying begins. Mrs. Winsheimer hangs her apple heads about three feet above the range burner. Or, they can be put in an oven at 100 to 125 degrees. About 40 hours are needed for drying. The pipecleaner and sulphur is removed from the



Apple doll figures include, from the left, checker players, Abe Lincoln, farmer with prize pumpkin and the Pope.

center, which is packed with cotton to help retain the shape.

The head is allowed to dry at room temperature for some four weeks to complete the shrinking process.

The faces are then tinted with acrylic paints and sprayed with a light acrylic varnish.

Eyebrows and hair are applied. Tight curly hair can be sculptured or yarn used for braids. Fake fur is another suitable material, along with wig hair or cotton.

Bodies are made in three sections, using pipe cleaners to shape the figure. The cleaners are covered with cotton, which is tied tightly with string.

Pariscraft, the same material used for making casts, forms the final body covering. It is wrapped around the cotton, leaving joints free in order to position the figures.

Authentic dress is then made for the figures and they are placed in appropriate sculptured settings.

Sculptamold, a modeling powder, is used to make the settings and minute accessories. Mixed with water, it can be molded like clay and does not require firing.

Accessories from the sculptamold can include shoes, tiny apples complete with stems, string beans or even the hair.



Apple sculptress work on new head.

From start to finish requires about six to eight weeks, primarily because of the drying time.

"The Bicentennial year prompted a spirited revival in crafts such as this," Mrs. Winsheimer said.

"I started attending exhibits and giving programs at that time.

"The best way for anyone interested is to watch someone doing it and then just try it."

Mrs. Winsheimer's apple art sculptures range in price from about \$30 to \$50. She had about a score of different sculptures at the craft show held Sunday in the Farm Show Building in conjunction with the Keystone International Livestock Exposition.

Subjects for the apple sculpturing are nearly limitless, the only restriction being older figures since the shrinking process applies natural lines of aging and character to the faces.



In foreground is pair of apple butter making matrons; while in background are King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn.



Here's a variety of apple dolls, including heavy lady at bus stop, which Mrs. Winsheimer patterned after an aunt.