

Two New Exhibitions on Display at the Military Museum

Military Art: Selections from the State Museum

Since ancient times, artists have been fascinated by military themes and have used them to commemorate famous battles, celebrate heroes, mourn deceased warriors and to simply document the uniforms, weapons, and events of the martial activities which constantly changed their lives and culture. Artists have created works of historic military subjects in paintings, portraits, sculptures, engravings, lithographs, woodcuts, and photographs. These artists have attempted to capture the range of war-torn emotion; chaos, loss, courage and the full panoply of war.

A sampling of diverse works from the collection of the Tennessee State Museum is highlighted in this exhibition which opened to the public on May 1st. The pieces are arranged in chronological order and feature such famous artists as Thure de Thulstrup, Benson Lossing, and Tennesseans Gilbert Gaul, David Wright, and Washington Cooper, as well as the lesser known works of common soldiers and amateur civilians. Yet, all the artworks have one unifying theme — to preserve a time, a place, and sense of America's military past.

This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the museum's military art collection. The permanent exhibitions of the State Museum, located in the War Memorial and in the main museum at the James K. Polk Cultural Center, are teeming with pieces of military-themed artwork that encourage the student of history in all of us.



Colonel Samuel Beatty, 19th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, H.S. Phillips, 1862, oil on canvas

From Toys to Works of Art

A History of Toy Soldiers and Military Miniatures

Also on exhibit at the Military Museum is the State Museum's unique collection of toy soldiers and military miniatures.

Until the mid 18th century, toy soldiers and miniatures were the playthings of the wealthy and powerful. Individually made from wood, clay, or cast metal, these tiny troops were too expensive for a common household. In the early 1750's, German craftsmen began to cast tin alloy figures on a production basis. Called "zinnfiguren" —literally tin figures— these inexpensive toys laid the foundation for all military oriented miniatures and toys that followed. As they became more readily available, contemporary notables such as Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Winston Churchill and H. G. Wells never outgrew the fun of playing with these model figures.



Standard Bearer, Cheveau leger, lanciers hollandaise, 2e regiment, Garde Imperiale

The exhibition examines the intricate design and complex fabrication of these tiny soldiers created by international craftsmen over the centuries.

Tracing the history of toy soldiers and military miniatures from the 19th century, when German toy makers dominated the market, until modern times, the exhibit showcases the full military regalia of various armies in miniature view. Early toy makers used a variety of materials to produce their products such as cast lead, aluminum, spelter, iron, paper-mâché, and mixtures of wood pulp and glue. Plastic began to replace other materials as the medium for manufacturing armies of toy soldiers after World War II.

Both exhibits are located in the Military Museum in the War Memorial Building across the street from the main museum and continue through the end of the year.