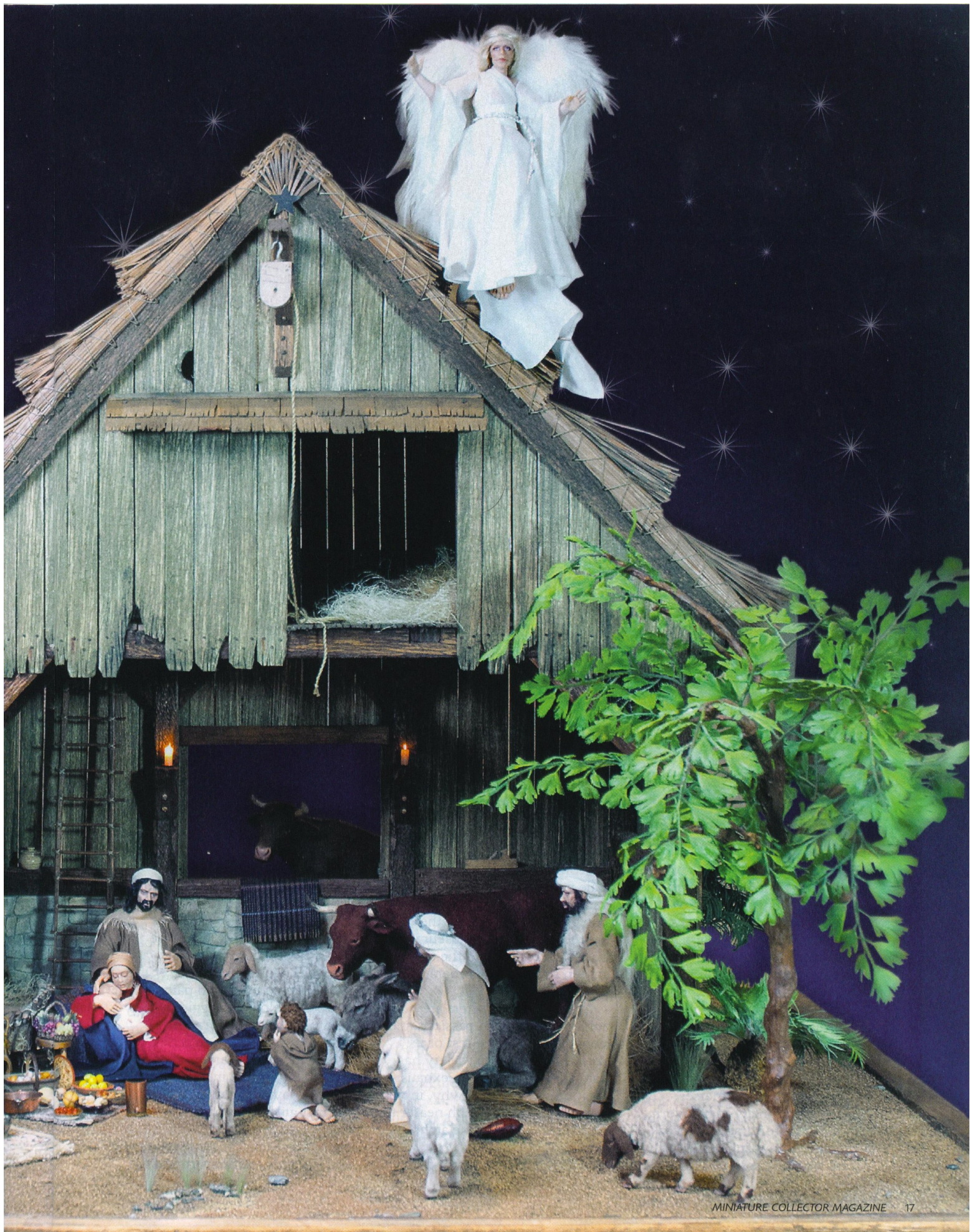


Miniature Collector

Jamie Carrington Interprets the *Nativity*

By Sharon Doddroe
Photography by Kim McKisson

The nativity exhibit was based on the oil painting *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Michelangelo Caravaggio.





There have been many artistic interpretations depicting the birth of Jesus—paintings, illustrations, sculptures and stained glass have all beautifully illuminated the moment throughout history. But Jamie Carrington's expressive character dolls have a way of capturing the scene so poignantly, you can feel the emotion in the air.

Perhaps that is because the English dollmaker immerses himself emotionally in his work. He is known for drama, in work and in life, admitting he had to access his more serious side for

the commission. But the 1-inch scale nativity, which resides in the Kathleen Savage Browning Miniatures Collection at the Kentucky Gateway Museum Center, is a tribute to the often unseen side of the exuberant artisan.

"The main characters are human beings with passions and feelings just like the rest of us," explains Carrington. "Mary has just given birth after an exhausting journey, which is why, in my version, I moved Joseph nearer to her, to comfort her like any husband would."

Carrington feels many depic-

tions of the nativity portray Joseph as an old man relegated to the side. "I wanted him younger and to be involved with his wife," explains the artist. One of Carrington's inspirations was the 1609 painting *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Italian painter Michelangelo Caravaggio. Another, more modern muse, was a British television series which depicted Mary and Joseph as a young couple in love. After that, he says, empathy and instinct guided his hands.

"It was important to me to capture the tenderness of Mary and Joseph's relationship and the



The nativity reflects the influence of Michelangelo Caravaggio's painting, *Adoration of the Shepherds* from 1609.

The 1-inch scale nativity scene at the KSB Miniatures Collection was created by Jamie Carrington (figures), Teresa Layman (stable) and Kerri Pajutee (animals).

moment immediately following the birth," says Carrington. He also appreciated that Caravaggio's version did not show the face of baby Jesus. "I loved the idea that the baby Christ's face is turned away and tucked into his mother's neck so that we have to imagine what he looked like."

His fellow artisans on the project agreed with his vision. Teresa Layman pulled inspiration from the painting to influence her interpretation of the stable. She wanted the structure to appear as

if it had been around for ages and spent hours weathering beams and thatching the roof. Animal artisan, Kerri Pajutee, added realism with her lifelike animals, paying special attention to match the camel's accoutrements with the magi.

The wise men, says Carrington, were the more complex figures, but also the most "magical." "I wanted to portray them as a different race to Mary and Joseph, trusting in their faith to follow a star over many lands

which foretold the birth of the Savior."

While Carrington takes great care in creating facial expressions and body positioning to elicit emotion, there is undeniable subtlety and a revealing attribute in his costuming. He imagines how the fabric will hang while he sculpts, often choosing materials that give gravity and weight to the character. The former theater designer and dresser also gives careful consideration to color and history. He adhered to a strict

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"I prefer to let the clay tell me what it wants to do."*



Jamie, who has a background in dance and theater, draws heavily from his former careers to create accuracy in anatomy and costuming.

color code to keep the viewers' eyes on the main characters and selected materials to add authenticity to the scene.

"The fabrics for the characters were chosen to show their station in life. The shepherds were in rough cotton in scale to give the appearance of hand-woven cloth. Mary was in double-layered red lawn to make it opaque, but to appear like wool, and Joseph was in fine linen."

The magi, in contrast, were dressed in pure silk and trimmed with assorted gold braids, chenille and other fine trimmings, says Carrington. "Fun to do, but it could have gone over the top," he adds, explaining he had to ponder what the three kings may have gone through on their storied passage. "They traveled over many lands enduring heat and cold on the backs of camels, for

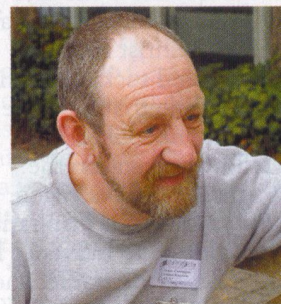
goodness sake!" says Carrington. He cites his theater background for keeping him grounded when illustrating not only the present scene, but also what has transpired in the course of getting there.

The fact that Carrington always considers the journey in his work is one of things that make him special as an artist. He never forgets how he has arrived to this place in life—always appreciative, able to see the past for its gifts and its gaffes, and eager to keep creating.

"I consider myself to be one of the luckiest people in the world. I get to play in my workshop, get lost in my miniature chaos and meet some of the most wonderful people in the world. What could be better?"

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*The nativity will be on display in the
KSB Miniatures
Collection in Maysville, Kentucky,
through mid-January 2015. Visit
ksbminiaturescollection.com for exact
dates.*



Jamie Carrington