

Imperfections

There they were, faint beneath the inhuman glow of fluorescent lights. Boxes and boxes of idyllic little porcelain figures lay stacked and waiting. This was today's job. This was tomorrow's job. Tiny hand painted toddlers were about to consume my entire week.

Before this I never had a reason to pay attention to detail. I list boxes of people's odds and ends on eBay for a living. It's been a quick and easy way to make money. Normally, I'd pull out an item, look it up and down, write a quick description, and click submit. That is, until I started listing Hummel figurines.

At first, I listed the entire little lot -- every single one in mint condition. It took a while to get over the fact that I spent more time looking into their fixed glossy eyes than I spent with actual people, but these were perfect. Well, I thought that these were perfect.

Scrutinous Hummel buyers (and they all were) refused to bid until they had questioned every last possible flaw of each uncomfortably cute figure. Forced to care, I bought a loupe and a book on official figurines. The Hummel Field Guide was like reading a Lilliputian dermatologist's manual. Having to reference it often, I re-inspected each piece for malignancies. I scanned over and over for the cancers of improper care and age. Ignoring the hesitant smiles of the miniature German statues, my eyes examined their every inch. Under the magnifying lens, my life very quickly became filled with sickeningly sweet porcelain.

Identifying blemishes was not as apparent as I had expected. In the beginning I was convinced that their pallor was a defect, as if they had been in their boxes for too long. I quickly learned that this was normal, though their craquelature was not. Every time I saw crazing, my dry, white hands would make a note. I also recorded pieces with fleabites. These barely visible dots and pinpricks designated flaws in the initial manufacturing of a statue.

While surveying for fleck and hollow I casually glanced at my hand. My thumb, wrapped around a little boy playing an accordion, looked different to me. I couldn't place it initially, but then I saw them, hiding there. Under the skin, almost imperceptibly, three dots formed a wart. Though small it marked my finger with a slight discoloration. Surprised, I put down the collectible and looked more closely at my finger. It was just a wart. Sighing, I picked up the boy once more and went back to work.

Over the next few days, as I listed so many cherub-like statuettes, my distracted eyes found themselves inspecting my thumb, then my hand, and so on. I tried to ignore my body, but slowly began to scrutinize it with more intensity than the Hummels I was listing. Trying to refocus myself, I would type away at my computer or squint through the lens of my loupe. This did not work – reminders of my body were all around. My gut loomed in the sagging bag of packing peanuts, while my yellowing teeth were hidden among the water stains and mold of the ceiling. I saw my pale skin in the concrete walls, my receding hairline in the wearing carpet, and the miniscule wart in each period typed. Overwhelmed, I closed my eyes.

Wrapping up the lasts of the Hummels, I placed it in a box with the tag “will not list,” and then clocked out early. With my hands in my pockets and my sleeves pulled all the way down I turned out the lights, locked the door, and walked to my car. In the driver's seat I let out a deep breath and removed the little hula girl from my dashboard, placing her face down in my cup holder. Driving away from the parking lot, I was stopped by the red light before the freeway. I looked at all of the cars passing by, all of the people in their little boxes, neatly packaged and buckled in. Sitting there, watching the cars drive past, I repeated myself saying, I'm not flawed, I'm normal, I'm not flawed, I'm normal, I'm not flawed, I'm normal. As the light turned green I pulled my little box onto the freeway among the others. Merging into

traffic, I desperately wanted to believe that everyone else, strapped into their own tiny car, was just like me.