

# Antiquers and Collectors Information Guide

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## Valentine's Cupid Restored

By DiAnna Tindell

A celebration of love takes place every February 14th and is popularly known as Valentine's Day. While Valentine's Day is primarily recognized in the United States and Britain, it is also celebrated in Italy, France, Austria, Hungary, Germany and Spain. It began in ancient times as the Roman festival of Lupercalia, a fertility ritual, and was celebrated on the Ides of February (Feb. 15). The colors generally associated with Valentine's Day are red and white, symbolizing things such as warmth and purity. Images also prominently associated with the day are Cupids with bow and arrows, hearts and arrows, lovebirds, and Valentine cards.

The Cupid has been included as a decorative part of many art forms. According to Roman mythology, it was Cupid who urged Aeneas to fall in love with Dido, Queen of Carthage. Cupid also took Psyche as a lover



Cupids like this finely detailed Meissen figure often get their wings chipped or broken.

and, along with Apollo, sought the hand of Hero, a priestess to Venus.

Valentine's Day illustrations often include Cupid, the Roman god of love, mending yet another broken heart. Cupid will patch it to make a new start. Cupid usually appears with wings and a bow and arrows. Cupid's arrow represents love, and anyone hit by Cupid's arrow will fall in love.

As a restoration specialist, Cupid, in one form or another, has been a frequent guest in my studio. Cupid has sometimes been confused with and referred to as a cherub. Generally, a cherub flutters about and often appears like Cupid, but without the bow and arrows. Cherubs have sometimes been portrayed with sea nymphs bearing gifts.

Cupid, as a winged creature, often seems to fall victim to flying accidents. As a result, he spends a great deal of time recovering in a restoration studio. The most common

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## Cupid Restoration...continued

injury is to his wings. Feathers are sometimes chipped, broken, and even torn off completely. Sometimes Cupid may even lose his head, arms, legs, hands and feet. These types of injuries require a bit more recovery time than perhaps damage to his bow, arrows, loincloth and other adornments.

Porcelain candelabra and large tier compotes tend to have at least one Cupid or cherub attached in the trees or lying about. On average, they may be present on two out of ten pieces, especially if the piece is of European origin. Cupids are also found as prominent features on many porcelain lamps. If found on smaller collectible objects, Cupid's appearance is sometimes altered to include fairyland features. The restoration of most decorative Cupid objects can be fairly routine and will not present much of a challenge. The older, rare and finely detailed structure of European pieces such as Meissen and Dresden, however, are an entirely different matter. The damage to wings may be of greater concern. The attachment of a wing requires reliable bonding and reinforcing materials for a long lasting hold. Often, the recreation

off the page can be projected through an Artograph Tracer type system, lined-up to scale with the actual piece, and then traced for a scale mark-up to work from. If no projection system is available, try tracing the image and enlarging it with a copier and then turn it over to trace the mirror image. The possibilities are only limited by one's imagination and ingenuity.

Before attaching a part back to the main body, it is usually best to complete all restoration processes, including all fine detail painting. Fasten the replacement part to a small "helping hand tweezer" device that allows you to paint it without touching the part.

Cupids and cherubs are usually posed partially nude, and therefore, the restoration requires mastery of various flesh tones that may fluctuate from pale to blushing, depending on what he has been up to. Facial features can be very demanding if a head injury includes eyes, brows, nose, mouth and blushing cheeks. The hand painting of such details requires expertise.

Lastly, what can be done about replacing parts such as the bow and arrows, roses, leaves, etc.? If all else fails, you could possibly find a match at a local toy store among the tiny warrior figurines. Either mold a copy from the plastic parts or just apply a porcelain slip over them to create an outside texture to match the body type of the injured Cupid.

When you have been in the restoration business for any significant period of time, it is inevitable that you will encounter varied body parts that include Cupids and cherubs. They are clearly favorite figures among collectors, perhaps because of the many tales of love and romance that they portray. That is probably why collectors prominently display them all year round rather than just on Valentine's Day.

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"Helping hand" tweezer (center) holds new wing part for painting before attaching.

of the more minutely detailed feathering of a Cupid's wing will demand the expertise and patience of a master restoration specialist.

A common mistake occurs when one assumes that a new wing can be created from the remaining undamaged wing. The good wing is normally in an opposite or reverse pose of the missing or damaged wing. If a restoration studio stockpiled prior molds and prototypes of previous wings formed from earlier Cupid projects, you might be able to find a suitable match to be copied. Of course, there may already be enough damaged Cupids and Cherubs available in the studio or a quick trip to a decorative or antique store may provide the right mode. Sometimes, a bird's wing will provide an adequate template.

Normally, the best way to replace a Cupid's wing is to make a mold of an already existing wing part. If this isn't possible, a free-hand sculpted piece could be fashioned, but this will require a lot more time to include the feathering detail usually needed. If the Cupid is of historical value and can be found pictured in a reference book, the image



Cupids on bisque shoe, altered with butterfly wings.