

Adult modelers create works of art

Model kits aren't just for kids.

A visit to the Blue Max hobby shop in Canton proves the point. There co-owners Bob Mills and Max Bell cringe everytime a customer refers to their "toy soldiers" and "toy airplanes."

After all, the men have spent 100 or more hours on a single model, and the result is not a toy.

Mills' specialty is models of human figures. Bell's expertise is centered on model aircraft.



Bob Mills stresses research and there are many publications which aid the modeler. (Staff photos by Gary Caskey)

And it was their hobby that brought them together in business.

"I guess you'd call us the walking wounded. Both of us had been injured on our jobs and had to find a new way to earn a living. We enjoyed modeling very much and agreed we like to help others enjoy the hobby," said Mills.

The Blue Max opened 3 1/2 months ago.

ITS CABINETS are filled with the handwork of Mills and other modelers, both youths and adults.

The aircraft suspended from the ceiling were constructed by Bell.

He favors vac-u-form starter kits—made of plastic which is vacuum drawn over a mold. All major components are in a sheet of white plastic which is cut with a hot knife or an Exacto.

The aircraft models are of hard-to-find planes "passed over by most companies," said Mills. "These cover the historical end of aviation. They give the modeler an opportunity to build what they want—the more unusual aircraft."

The results are picture-perfect miniatures. "There's a Fieseler Storch," said Mills. "Rommel used one of those for observation in North Africa. Most of our adult modelers are historians."

"People who are into it have extensive reference libraries and add to them continually. We stress research. They should find out everything about it before they build." He has about \$10,000 invested in his own reference library.

The shop stocks a variety of magazines containing historical backgrounds and color plates of the models.

"THERE IS no time limit on the figures. They go from Neanderthal man to the future.

"There also are characters from fiction and fantasy. Your imagination is the only limit," said Mills.

The showcase also holds a historical pageant, including Chesley Puller, Lt. General in U.S. Marine Corps. The model depicts Puller as a colonel in 1943. Wearing a simple drab uniform, Chesley was a prize winner.

"There were many brilliant, flamboyant uniforms in the contest," said Mills. "I was surprised when he won."

Also included are models of Stonewall Jackson, a 7th cavalry officer; Errol Flynn as Geoffrey Hawk; Loki, evil god of Norse mythology; a Mideast slave auction; a Viking killing a monk; Anne Boleyn; a Saxon and a Norman from the 1060s; Seneca warrior; Wyatt Earp; Doc Holliday; a French Foreign Legionnaire, another prize-winner; Robin Hood; Henry V in full uniform; Civil War and Revolutionary War generals; a Greek archer; and an Italian pilot with his dog.

THE FIGURES are available in many scales but the 54 mm is most popular.

Walter Plank, the pirate, is a larger figure. Mill says he already has spent 120 hours on the pirate and it is not finished. "I have to do the veining in the hands."

Pointing to a helicopter, he said, "the builder spent a year on this one and it has taken first place everywhere it was shown."

It started out as a \$1.75 kit but cost \$100 before it was finished.

Mills and Bell are members of the International Plastic Modeling Society. The local branch, which has more than 50 members, meets every two weeks in Livonia. The society has its own publications and annual conventions.

"We swap information and show each other what we are doing at the meetings," said Mills. "Our wives really enjoy the conventions. When they meet all the people involved in the hobby, they are more understanding about our involvement."

"YOU WILL FIND almost every occupation (interested in modeling). There are doctors—especially surgeons—lawyers, airline pilots, cargo people, just about everyone," said Mills. "My partner was formerly a truck driver."

Most of the models are made in England, France, Italy, Germany and Japan. "The Historex series from France has about 200 figures from the Napoleonic era—French troops and those from the armies which opposed him."

Mills has great admiration for the sculptors who create the original figures for the molds.

"Some of the artists free lance and the manufacturers have their own artists. I'd like to take a course in sculpture and try my hand at it some day."

"The British are way ahead of us. They have been using oils for years. I just started to use oils four years ago—the texture, the colors, the details are so much better with oils."

Bell talked as he opened a new shipment. "Here they are," he said, "just what we've been waiting for—R2-D2 and C-3PO."

He continued, "Techniques change. So many of the processes I went through can now be eliminated. We have Cub Scout troops come in and display the kids' models in the shop. Everyone learns from one model to the next."



Mill's paintings are part of the historic research that is the preparation for his models.

One moment, please

America's first transcontinental telephone call was made Jan. 25, 1915, between two pioneers in the field. Alexander Graham Bell, in New York City, repeated his famous "Come here, Watson, I need you" to his aide, Thomas Watson. Watson responded in San Francisco, almost 3,000 miles away.

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