



## ***A Still Life: Photography and Writing* by Linda Briskin**

Linda Briskin is a writer and a fine art photographer. She is intrigued by the relationship between text and image.

A fictional encounter between the objects on the printer's tray in *A Still Life (ii)* and their owner, Miss Emma was published in *The Ekphrastic Review*. 5 July 2022.

### *A Still Life: A Fictional Encounter*

Miss Emma moves the objects around until they are in perfect dialogue with one another. The wooden mice, one longing to dance, one turning away. The doll with its expressive porcelain face, observing. The platinum teapot possibly the home of an elf. The lonely but small and sturdy pig. She caresses each one. These tinys, as she calls them, touch her child heart, rarely accessible with the weight of life and the passing of time.

The compartments of her printers' tray, once filled with letters for hand setting type, now offer a home for these treasures. She's gratified to be part of a long tradition. *Cabinets of Curiosities*, also called *Wonder Rooms*, originated in the sixteenth century and housed oddities, art, and archaeological finds.

Her camera captures the arrangements. Through the camera's eye, she immerses herself in this other world, and listens to the banter between her treasures—mice and milk bottles, silver snails and desert snails, books and sand dollars.

She records her imaginings in her *Diary of Curiosities*, started thirty-one years ago, all the more precious for its worn and faded red leather cover. The black and white pot, perhaps from the Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico, captures the long-eared rabbit with the slimmest brush. The clay jug the colour of the modest beauty of the desert.

She is dogged in her pursuit of the provenance behind each object, nuggets of information to inspire daydreaming. From *The Miniature Book Society* (chartered in 1983), she discovered that young Victorian ladies discreetly carried tiny books of etiquette to ensure they behaved properly.

Miss Emma is fond of objets trouvés, especially ephemeral offerings from the sea and desert. The white snail (also known as *Eremarionta Immaculata*), a hermaphrodite which survives in the desert by going dormant underground. Miniature sand dollars from Cayman Brac which clone themselves. Seaweed washed up on the western shores of Newfoundland; and a fragment of bone, now pure white, found on the edge of Lake Ontario.

Her small objects are mysterious and reassuring. Each tiny perfection entices her to look more closely, even whisper to them. They draw her into a secret world, a step away from the chaos and clatter and chatter of unruly everyday spaces. She's always been solitary, inclined to invention, finding pleasure and reassurance in her own imaginings.

Today yet another clash on a busy street with the bully boys on bikes who swing around her in circles, laughing maliciously and chanting *Witch! Witch! Witch!*

Miss Emma brushes off the outside world and constructs walls out of stories. She lowers her hunched shoulders and breathes deeply. Not defeated. No, never. She carefully re-arranges her tinys, listens to new conversations, and embraces the comforting intimacy of her treasures.