

# Majolica Matters!



THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE MAJOLICA INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY  
www.majolicasociety.com

March 2007

## Honoring Messieur Robert Lehr

By Wanda Matthes

Recently, we received very sad news from France. Messieur Robert Lehr, one of the founding members of Majolica International Society passed away.



I met him in the spring of 2000 when the Majolica Society's annual meeting was held in Wilmington, Delaware. MIS's Saturday bus trip took us to the Winterthur Museum in nearby Winterthur, Delaware and was concluded by a visit

to the home of member Mary Jo Chandler.

Many of you have visited the Winterthur Museum which was established by Henry Francis de Pont in 1951. It is a huge American country estate which houses thousands of objects made or used in America between 1640 and 1860. The museum displays collections of furniture, architecture, textiles, paintings, metals, ceramics, glass and works of arts on paper.



Upon arriving at the museum, we were divided into groups of ten to twelve persons, each group having its own docent. Robert was in the group with Duane and

me, allowing us to spend a bit of one on one time with him. This, along with the experience of walking through the azalea laden gardens at Winterthur with Marilyn Karmason, Phil English and Robert, was an experience that I and the other MIS members present on that day most certainly treasure.

Robert had corresponded with me several times in the recent past. The last two times were by email and came in late December of 2006 and in early January of 2007 after he had received his copy of *Majolica Matters*. This time, he chose to write to me in French because he felt that I now would be fluent of French. Not so! He expressed his disappointment with the fact that Duane, I and Joan Stacke had not called on him while we were in Paris last September. I answered his email, promising to visit him soon. As always, thinking that we had plenty of time to do so. A few days later, I received a second email where he reminisced about that first meeting of the MIS. He described how he had been invited to New York with the idea that a majolica society was in the making. It was only upon his arrival in New York to meet with Marilyn Karmason and Joan Stacke that he discovered that the actual meeting was in Fort Wayne, Indiana! It was at that time that the society was formed and, because Robert was from France, became the Majolica International Society!

When Robert's second email arrived, I was determined to answer him in French. Because this is still difficult and time consuming for my beginning French skills, I procrastinated. Imagine my guilt and sadness when a week later, I received a call from Joan Stacke with the sad news that Laurence Vauclair had relayed to her. Robert has passed away!

Since many of the MIS members did not know Robert well, I felt it was important to hear from those who did have an intimate acquaintance with him to give us insight into who Messieur Robert really was.

### **Laurence Vauclair**

#### **Aidjolate Antiquités – Galerie Vauclair**

I would like to start by mentioning that his name should be associated with that of someone else. It is

indeed impossible to mention Robert Lehr without thinking about his wife Sophie Lehr as well. They had such a powerful love for one another that they shared but one heart. One heart in respect of their love, one common quest for beauty and happiness as well as a shared enthusiasm for majolica.

Sophie Lehr was a superb antique dealer who had a passion for English furniture and, later, for majolica, that she spread outside France. She went antiquing throughout the world, looking for exceptional pieces. She did not care for the mediocre and she was known to similarly enjoy an outstanding jardinière and pedestal by Jerome Massier with a pink flamingo adorned with butterflies or a frog singing a music sheet nested between her legs.

So strong and contaminating was this passion that her husband Robert, a chemist by trade, became an expert in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century ceramics and, above all, in majolica and Palissy followers.

Robert followed Sophie, looking for majolica. Theirs was a never-ending quest, their Holy Grail! They hopped from one country to the next. From one capital to the next: Paris, London, and New York. Nothing escaped their feverish itinerary in search for the exceptional.

Robert collaborated on several books, leaving in particular a strong mark with Marshall Katz in a book dedicated to Palissy followers which has, since then, become a reference. No one at the Tours museum has forgotten his unrelated genealogical research which led us to better understand or even discover certain ceramists from Touraine who were passionate about producing their work.  
"In the style of..."

He paced museums from here and there. He hunted down the most beautiful pieces which belonged to collectors and antique dealers. He spent hours in libraries in order to produce an inventory of pieces from Touraine, the Ecole de Paris and Independents. Thanks to his colossal research, "rustiques figulines" claimed their way back into the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ceramic history.

He reopened the research started a long time ago by Horace Hennion, curator of the Tours Museum, so that the wonderful "rustiques figulines" produced by potters' workshops were remembered as the true works of art they were.

He mentioned in his various publications large manufactures, as much as, small workshops in

Sarreguemines, Choisy le Roi, Jules Lermes, Longchamps, Auteuil, Pointu, Fives Lille... the list goes on and on.

Robert Lehr was a precious man who revered beauty, success, as well as, perfection in craft. He felt passionately about promoting things he truly believed in. He was an aesthete who enjoyed good wine, good food, who knew the best restaurants where he was celebrated as a true connoisseur. His love went to people who were thriving for perfection.

Robert was the happiest man in the world when Sophie was coming back in the wee hours of the morning from a flea market, having discovered something unusual. There was this smile, this mischievous smile from someone who had discovered a treasure... They often had this same smile, the same twinkle in the eye....

For those of us who were fortunate enough to know them, there will always be the memory of the house in Biot, where Robert and Sophie welcomed visitors, collectors, amateurs or just people with a passing interest in majolica.

From large events like the Biennale to which Sophie participated five times when she was specialising in English 19<sup>th</sup> century furniture to Les Puces in Saint Ouen and the Marché Biron where she met Robert who was looking for a desk.... you know the end of this one! There were also several shops in Paris... They shared a passion for several decades, this quest for beauty, absolute, and the hope of finding THE piece missing from our collection!

The man with a bow-tie, as smart as a Jardinière and Pedestal from Massier, is now gone, looking for Sophie, his Muse, his love, our friend.

Thank you - Sophie and Robert for having passed your love for Majolica on to me. I will strive to share my knowledge and my findings just as they did.

#### **Marshall Katz**

I was introduced to Robert Lehr by Marilyn Karmason as a dealer in Palissy ware. He soon became an important source of supply for me and we rapidly became friends. One day in France I asked him if he ever considered writing a book on Palissy ware, and he replied that he did. I then inquired if he would be willing to write one with me. Thus began a 2-3 year adventure including the search for a publisher which led us to England and a small London based firm. During the interim, Robert and I wrote several articles together for European antique magazines. We saw

one another often, he coming to Pittsburgh on one occasion. We had a small dinner party at the home in his honor. Just as a dessert was being served, Robert excused himself. He returned 10 minutes later, and to his amazement, everyone had gone home. It was already midnight, just when the French “**Start**” their evening.

### **Hubert De Forges**

Robert Lehr was a friend for a good forty years. He never forgot that it was due to my “match making” that he married his wife Sophie Lehr – whom he adored. Sophie was my very best friend first but when they got together, Robert instantly became my friend too.

I was extremely sad to hear of his passing the same day of Sophie’s passing in 2000. Just this past Christmas, I received his last card that I will keep with my private papers forever. Good bye Robert. I know without Sophie it was difficult for you. I will pray for you both, remembering what good friends we were.

### **Geoffrey Luff.**

I did not know Robert Lehr well. He came to see me at my studio in Touraine with his wife. He had seen some of my work and was intrigued and wanted to see the process of making Palissy Ware.

We spent a couple of hours in my workshop and then chatted over lunch. A nicer, more interesting man you could not find. The Palissy Ware book that he and Marshall Katz produced will remain a classic for years to come.

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## **Western States Meeting – April 21, 2007**

**By Maryanne Leckie**

All western states members of the MIS are invited to the Newport Beach, CA home of Delegate-at-Large, Maryanne Leckie, on Saturday, April 21, 2007 at 11:00 A.M. for a special meeting. It will be a chance for western states members to share ideas and get better acquainted.

Maryanne will have a tour of her home so members can see her Majolica collection and how she has displayed it. There will be news and information about upcoming Majolica events. Members are encouraged to bring details about their favorite Majolica dealers, restorers and appraisers. Innovative ways to show a collection in a home setting will also be discussed. Attendees are urged to bring photos of their collections and effective home displays.

Another important topic that will be shared is providing for the future of members’ collections. Members will provide museum and gallery information about how they have handled their collection in their will or trust.

The meeting will be an open forum for ideas and help. Members are asked to email ([MHLeckie949@aol.com](mailto:MHLeckie949@aol.com)) or call Maryanne (949-645-0543) with additional discussion topics.

Invitations are in the mail including an R.S.V.P. form and directions to her home. A catered luncheon will be served. The reservation deadline is April 7, 2007.

For members from out of the area, Maryanne will give some suggestions on where to stay and some ideas of the many interesting and fun things to do in the Orange County area. This is the first time that western states members have had a gathering outside of the conventions. We are planning on a good turnout!

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## **How One Young Man Became a Collector**

**By Deborah English**

This story will raise some questions that have no answers. A while ago, MIS Secretary Linda LaPointe received an email from a non-member, James Raphael Rodriguez, who asked her about some pieces of majolica that had been in his family. As Linda often does, she forwarded the email to some other members and asked us for opinions. We all answered that we believed the majolica to be Continental, probably Austrian, Bohemian or German, and made at about the turn of the 20th Century. Nicolaus Boston confirmed this opinion and further identified a pedestal as “likely” Julius Dressler, the Bohemian potter. Linda regularly receives questions like this so the story might have ended there.

As it turns out, this story is really not about majolica. It is about the attachments we form to inanimate objects. It’s also about how external forces can direct our lives. It’s about how we can’t escape the impact of history. Here is a collector (though I don’t think he’d use that word) who is trying to preserve his family’s heritage through the pursuit of treasured pieces of majolica. These inanimate pieces of pottery are, for him, a symbol of his family’s achievements and standing in a society long lost through revolution and suppression. We all have our reasons for collecting—each as individual as we are. Collecting majolica obviously satisfies something in us, but what compels the recurring urge to add another piece to our crowded shelves? Why do we feel the need to collect?

What do these objects mean to us? What will they mean to our heirs? These are questions we often discuss in these pages. Perhaps through the compelling story of our new friend, James, we will recognize a few of our own motivations for collecting.

In his email, James Rafael Rodriguez explained that his family's majolica had been stolen in 2000 from his grandparents' house in Cuba. He hoped to be able to locate the majolica and restore it to his family. He asked for our help. We explained that since majolica was made in multiples, it was unlikely that he would ever be able to identify the lost objects without more than the old photographs that he has to show us. To help him clarify his search, we recommended D. Michael Murray's book, European Majolica, explaining that little has been published about the German manufacturers, owing to the destruction of their factories during World Wars I and II.



**An interior view of the house in Havana**

As is true for many people, James' family history is one of displacement and new beginnings. His great grandfather was Manuel Fernandez Blanco, a native of Santa Maria de Branes in the province of Asturias, Spain. He left Spain in 1895 and was in Cuba by 1898. He weathered the final convulsions of the Spanish American War and the tumultuous beginnings of national autonomy. He worked in his uncle's store, later establishing a career in the railroad. James thinks he worked on the cars because he traveled extensively throughout Cuba as part of his job. Settling in the Guanabacoa municipality of Havana, Senor Fernandez rented a beautiful house, which became home to a large extended family. The five-bedroom house was built about 1898, and has many of the embellishments of Colonial Cuban architecture, including beautiful tile flooring, an indoor patio and stained glass Cuban windows.

In the 1940's, Senor Fernandez bought thirteen pieces of ceramics that were displayed in the living room. They included: the pedestal, large compote with cherubs, a cherub majolica centerpiece, two royal blue urns, four figurines, three large majolica plates and one medium sized pedestal. This group of artifacts became a source of family pride.

Manuel Fernandez died in 1951 at the age of 72. He had never returned to Spain. Circa 1955, their landlord died and, by pooling their resources, the family was able to purchase the house for about \$7,500.

Fleeing the Castro regime, James' immediate family came to the US in 1962. James' grandfather's brother and sisters (all childless) tried to leave several times, but had to stay behind. By the time of the Mariel Boatlift in 1980, they felt too old to start anew.



**This assembly of three pieces is five feet and could be Julius Dressler**

#### Exile

By the nature of their exigencies, exiles have to leave their possessions behind. Cubans are required to leave their households to the State. Whenever the family



planned to leave, they were discovered and their plans exposed. Government agents came to the home to inventory the contents. It's a sure way to discourage emigration. Once, the siblings tried to pass their precious ceramics out the back door to the neighbors, who would hold them in safekeeping. They got caught.



**An elaborate Continental cherub centerpiece**

You see, since the 1959 Revolution, every block has a government “snoop” who reports to the authorities anything suspiciously subversive. The government knew that the Fernandez family owned ceramics and antique furniture. (People caught trying to hide valuable property are often detained and questioned.) The Fernandez holdings attracted the attention of the Town Hall officials, who invited them to display their ceramics there. The family declined, fearing that once the ceramics left their house, they would never see them again.

In 2000, burglars entered the house by breaking a window and stole five of the family's most beloved ceramics. It is these James hopes to replace. He has

found a couple of things, but is still looking.

Now, James' great aunts and uncle still live in the house. They are all in their nineties. They keep the doors locked, so resentful and fearful of the hostile environment they are forced to live in. If the Communist Regime survives them, the house and all its furnishings will go to the State. Some pieces may stay in the country for use in public spaces, but most will probably be spirited out of Cuba to Spain, where they will enter the European antiques market. James believes this is what happened to the ceramics stolen in 2000. Because Cuba has cordial relations with several southern European nations, it is easy to ship goods there without much oversight. In any case, once they go into the marketplace, retrieval becomes almost impossible. There is no insurance for the monetary loss.

In August of 2006, he went to visit his great uncle and aunts. They gave him the green compote to bring back to the US. At the Havana airport, customs officials found it, broke it in three pieces and refused to give it back. No personal property can leave Cuba. James hopes that it will be returned to his uncle and aunts, but he is doubtful.

Things in your ancestral home evoke childhood. Those of us lucky enough to have memories of our grandparents' houses surely cherish the way light fell on a table or the way the kitchen smelled. I remember both my grandparents' homes well and I feel nostalgia whenever I see a wooden picture puzzle or smell boxwood in the sun. We are the lucky ones. Some of our group lost everything sometime during the 20th century. War and political bullying made it happen. Some exiles came to the US. We all know someone who arrived here as a refugee. Others, such as the Holocaust victims, suffered unimaginably.

Among the properties of the dispossessed were the fantastic art collections of Austria, which were looted and are only now re-emerging on the market. A huge international effort is underway to restore the art to its last legitimate owners. However, only a fraction of that art can be returned. The practical complications of tracing artifacts and ownership are so myriad that only the most valuable objects get the attention needed. Those last legitimate owners, the ones who survived, have mostly died off now. So have the looters. Now we see these masterpieces coming back into public view. Heirs to the (recovered) looted artworks are putting them up for auction. Who wouldn't? They are too valuable to house and insure, and some of them can make a family rich for a lifetime. Still, one wonders what questions the heirs

struggle with in deciding to give up an important relic of their collective pasts. Such an object, with its ties to family history, representative of a time before the family lost everything, surely must carry significant emotional weight.

A Klimt masterpiece represents one point on the map of stolen patrimony. James' family's loss is representative of what happens to the other 99.9%. James is not an exile, though his parents are. James is a graduate student living in Miami. He is not part of the Cuban-American effort to overthrow Castro, though he holds no appreciation for Cuba's current regime. His family's collection is threatened by a double layer of theft: the almost certain seizure by the government after the deaths of the older generation, and the random, violent menace of robbery. As a collector, his aspirations are literal; he is trying to replace the objects that symbolized his family's heritage, which he sees as his birthright. He knows he can't replace the community he never saw; nor is it likely that he'll be able to save the house from falling into the government's hands. So, he wants to rescue the majolica of which his family was so proud. Failing that, he would like to re-create the memory of his great-grandfather's presence in the family, evoking him through the power of these extraordinary objects.

Is this the power of art at work? How would we all feel if we had to face this? Some of you can imagine how he feels.

If you know of any good sources for the type of majolica pictured here, or especially if you know where he can find replicas, James asks that you please contact him at:

[eterna9@bellsouth.net](mailto:eterna9@bellsouth.net)

Please send your comments and material for the newsletter to:

**Wanda Matthes**  
3801 Indigo Drive  
Plano, Texas  
Phone: 972 - 596 - 2964  
eMail: [Wanda@eMajolica.com](mailto:Wanda@eMajolica.com)

**Charleston Sunset, don't miss it, May 2007**



## **The Baltimore Antiques Show - 2006**

**By Deborah English**

The 26th Annual Baltimore Antiques Show took place during Labor Day weekend at the Convention Center in Crab Town. We Mid-Atlantic Majolica collectors have always looked forward to the event because we can always count on lots of top dealers to appear. Some, such as Charlie Washburne and Carole Kooperman, arrive every year. Others appear more sporadically. This time we were lucky to have a multitude of fine dealers. In fact, there are 550 booths displaying all kinds of decorative and fine arts. Truly international in its scope, it's a great afternoon for sightseeing, even if the wallet is feeling a little skinny.

Who knew that shows are bought and sold? Well, they are; and the folks who run the Palm Beach Antiques Show acquired this one. Dealers who show in Palm Beach were "strongly encouraged" to "give Baltimore a try". This achieved the desired result of giving fairgoers a much finer selection of goods from which to choose. I particularly noticed that the quality of paintings was better. A friend who collects Tibetan art said the same thing about his interests.



**Look at Nic Boston's "Black Forest" Majolica chairs!**

One of the pleasant results was the appearance of Nicolaus (Nic) Boston, who has visited here, but has never brought a booth before. Also, she does in Palm Beach; Joan Stacke Graham was serving as Majolica's ambassador. Using Nic's booth as home base, she engaged passers-by with conversation and good cheer.

As always, the fair brought out the folks around here who love to hang out at these shows, and on Thursday afternoon, we happened to see quite a few of them. We were especially pleased to see Barbara and Howard Silby. You might remember that Howard



was the courageous soul who started the original Majolica Matters. (Actually, he says he was "volunteered" by Joan. Is it possible?) This was before we all had the desktop publishing access that exists now. Howard had to do it the hard way... by hand.



**Howard Silby admires a George Jones cheese bell at Cara Antiques**

If you missed the Baltimore Antique Show of 2006 – why don't you make plans to visit it in 2007.

[www.baltimoresummerantiques.com](http://www.baltimoresummerantiques.com)  
August 30 thru September 2

**Maryse Bottero's - Whimsical Stand**

The October '06 cover of Antiquités magazine captured - STAND BOTTERO at the Antique Fair ANTIBES.



**Auctions**

**Christie's May 24, 2007** - Glass & Nineteenth Century Ceramics Auction at Christie's South Kensington, London. The auction includes a W. Brownfield Corn Spill Vase with Monkeys a Minton Cockerel & Monkey Teapot as well as, Minton 'Tower' Jugs.



**Majolica Auctions: Friday, March 30th, 2007 and Saturday, March 31st, 2007** - Two day majolica auctions include 1,100 lots including this very rare Monkey handled Marmalade pot from George Jones.



**Auction Result:** Wedgwood Fly Matchbox went at Halls Fine Arts a British auction house for approximately \$4,900 USD.



**Member Notes:**

Wanda, I just read the recent newsletter and enjoyed it as usual. I always learn something! I've attached photos of two pieces of Rörstrand that we have.

Let me know if these photos are useful or if you need them in a different format.

Regards,  
Lori Chaikin  
Showroom Manager  
Sparrows Antiques [www.sparrows.com](http://www.sparrows.com)



**Rörstrand Pedestal**



**Rörstrand Wall Bracket**

Dear Wanda,  
This is a delayed response to your request for photos of Rörstrand pieces in members' collections. I have two such pieces, a desert plate and a small Jardinière.



**Rörstrand Plate - 7 1/2"**

The jardinière I found in a small out-of-the-way shop in Filtoct, Norway in June of 2006. I thought it was worth bringing back as "carry-on".

Sincerely,  
Helen Neilson





**Rörstrand Jardinière – 8 ½” diameter wide**

Lastly – Here’s a playful and whimsical example in Trilogy Antique’s Rörstrand inventory.



**Rörstrand Bowl with Cat – 4 ¼” tall**

**2007 Society Dues Process**

Please check your address label on our mailing envelope. The red date such as “**2007-May**” indicates when you owe 2007 annual dues. Most members have already paid and won’t receive any 2007 dues invoice.

Please use the enclosed “**2007 Dues Invoice**” to send in your 2007 dues. If your envelope has no invoice then you don’t owe dues.

**A Rabbit Tale**

**By Wanda Matthes**

I know that many of you are collectors of the Choisy-le-Roi bunny plates. I just purchased one which we have always referred to as the “six bunny plate by the house”. Imagine my surprise when I counted the bunnies and found the hind quarters of tiny number seven, next to the house.

I have this plate in my own collection and have sold it many times and until today had never seen this variation. On close inspection of the plate on my wall, bunny seven is there but is virtually invisible since it is unpainted. In looking back at photos of all the ones we have had in inventory, only one other shows any hint of this bunny. This plate is marked with a G7 and stamped “Made in France”. Count your bunnies!

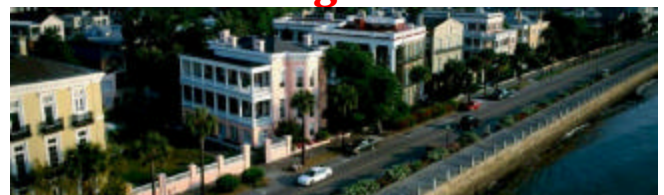


**Choisy-le-Roi Rabbit Plate with 7<sup>th</sup> Rabbit Detail**



**Rabbit Plate detail: with unpainted tail of #7**

**Charleston’s historic ocean walk  
is waiting for you.  
Fill out the registration form.**



## **Charleston, SC - 2007 Convention Destination!**

**Hurry, Hurry....don't be late, or you'll miss out on something GREAT!**

Come with us to Charleston the first week-end in May, and be prepared to have loads of fun – that you'll want to stay!

Old world charm, horse drawn carriages, cobblestone streets, antebellum homes, great antiques and fine restaurants and of course the 19th Annual Convention of the Majolica International Society: just a few of the reasons to plan your trip now.

? Our reduced hotel rate at the Embassy Suites Hotel (843-747-1882) is valid only through April 3rd, 2007, so please book your suite now!

? Our program includes great speakers, a historical bus tour of Charleston, allowing ample time for antiquing and browsing... and of course a fabulous Majolica Heaven, enhanced by the participation of a few new dealers.

We've all worked hard this year – we all deserve some fun..... So don't delay - Let's meet in Charleston and play!  
Gabrielle

? **Friday:** 7:00 pm Convention Registration  
7:30 pm: MajoliCake and Coffee  
**Collector Presentations:**  
**Pamela Every and Scott Campbell:** "What we Collect and Why!"  
**Laurence Vauclair:** ' Charles Avesseau and Palissy Ware

? **Saturday:** Breakfast, Program Events including a historical bus tour of Charleston, allowing ample time for antiquing and browsing  
**Evening:** Preview of **Majolica Heaven** to view the fabulous majolica wares of ten to twelve of the top American and International dealers along with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. Dinner and the keynote presentation by **Melissa Bennie of Christie's Auction House**, New York will follow. Melissa will present "From the Crystal Palace to Your Palace" ; a study of majolica featured in the great exhibitions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

? **Sunday:** 8:00 a.m, Breakfast and Annual Business Meeting.  
**Majolica Heaven:** 10:00 a.m. members only

Opens FREE to the public with at 12:00 AM and runs until 4:00 pm.



## **Make plans to be in CHARLESTON in MAY**

### **Note to MIS**

To whom it may concern,

Enclosed is my check of fifty dollars to cover membership costs in the Majolica Society for this year. I'm an avid collector and lover of majolica and fortunately nearby the auction facility that Michael Strawser utilizes in his biannual majolica auctions. The society is always mentioned, so I was aware of the organization, but until last fall when I met Maryanne Leckie I was not aware of what joining could mean to me.

Maryanne's enthusiasm and excitement is contagious and she is responsible for introducing me to the benefits of membership. She is a West Coast representative, yet she is the inspiration for this East Coast lover to join.

*Membership Team Note: As a MIS member – what have you done to recruit a new member?*

### **MajolicaMAIL Communications**

**By Duane Matthes**

We sent a "MajolicaMAIL" eMail out on **March 15th** to all members that have eMail addresses. **Eighteen messages got bounced back to me address unknown.** If you didn't get that email, then MIS doesn't have your email address recorded correctly or the mail got trapped in your SPAM filter. The message enters your mail process with the name of **Duane@majolicasociety.com** so please open that email address in your SPAM filter.

Please eMail **Duane@eMajolica.com** with issues or your corrected email so we can correct our records and communicate with you. Thanks for your help!