

EGYPT

*“Cats in ancient Egypt were worshipped as gods.
Cats have not forgotten this.”*

As any cat-person knows, this saying has some truth in it! Revered by the Egyptians as gods partly due to their ability to combat vermin such as mice and rats which threatened food supplies, cats of royalty were dressed in golden jewelry and allowed to eat from the plates of their owners. The cat goddess Bastet was the goddess of protection, pleasure, and the bringer of good health. She had the head of a cat and a slender body. It was believed that every day she would ride through the sky with her father, the sun god Ra. As his boat pulled the sun through the sky she would watch over and protect him. At night, she would turn into a cat to protect Ra from his greatest enemy, the serpent Apep.

DENMARK

Bing & Grøndahl was a Danish porcelain manufacturer founded in 1853. In addition to tableware and figurines, Bing & Grøndahl created a highly collectible series of Mother's Day and Christmas plates. Designed in a traditional cobalt blue and white, the plates were released annually for more than 100 years. Each year's Mother's Day plate depicted a different animal mother and her babies. In 1987, the company merged with its primary competitor, the Royal Porcelain Factory under the name Royal Copenhagen.

ENGLAND

The cat is one of Britain's best loved animals. Long before they became the pampered indoor pets of today, cats were valued for their role in controlling vermin on farms. The cat was also commonly found on many early trading, exploration, and naval ships, prized for their mousing skills as well as for good luck. (Strangely enough, black cats are considered a symbol of good luck in the UK, but bad luck in the rest of the world.) Cats are employed by the state to eradicate mice in official buildings, and over the years, their duties have even expanded to welcoming foreign dignitaries. “Chief Mouser to the Cabinet Office” is the title of the official resident cat at 10 Downing Street, the residence and executive office of the Prime Minister. There has been a resident cat in the British government employed as a mouser and pet since the 16th century.

STAFFORDSHIRE CATS

These Staffordshire cats represent a type of popular pottery figurine made in England from the 18th century onward. Figures were mainly made in Staffordshire but also in other counties and Scotland. The figures are typically earthenware, though early ones may be stoneware. Early subjects included figures of ladies and gentlemen, animals, musicians, lovers, shepherds, soldiers, politicians, and the like. Animal figurines were often produced in pairs to adorn mantelpieces, a good example being the ubiquitous King Charles Spaniel pairs which became very popular after Queen Victoria acquired a spaniel named Dash. The era of industrialisation saw an exodus from country to town, and for the first time in modern history, working-class people had funds sufficient to buy figures if they so wished. Manufacturers aimed to appeal to public taste, thereby leaving a physical record of the pursuits and interests of the time in a fascinating array of pottery figures.

Staffordshire Pottery Figures resonate with social history. They are folk art of the people for the people, and they echo the enthusiasm and taste of ordinary folk, during a time when life was vibrant, but in no way easy.

FAIRINGS

In England, between 1850 and 1914, you would have probably been the proud owner of a little china figurine like one of these after a visit to the fair. These amusing china ornaments were given away as prizes and sold as souvenirs to delight the crowds that streamed to the fairgrounds. Fairings were made of white soft-paste porcelain and often incorporated figures ranging from 3 to 5 inches tall. Because they were intended for display on mantelpieces or in display cabinets they usually have a rectangular base with a humorous caption written in black script on the front describing the particular scene. Ironically, although they depict typical Victorian English humour, most fairings were produced by Conta & Boehme in Germany. The production of fairings ended at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

JAPAN

MANEKI-NEKO

Cats are greatly revered in Japan as they are believed to bring good luck.. Everyone recognizes “Hello Kitty,” and there is even a cat island in Japan. The Maneki-Neko, (beckoning cat) is a universal Japanese figurine believed to bring good fortune to the owner. The figurine depicts a cat, traditionally a calico Japanese Bobtail, with a paw raised in a beckoning gesture. The figurines are displayed in every kind of business as well as in households.

The most popular legend of the Maneki-Neko is based on the story of Ii Naotaka

(1590-1659), the lord samurai of the Hikone domain. While passing the Gotokuji temple, Naotka saw a cat waving its paw and beckoning him at the temple gate. He came inside, and the delay saved his life. An unexpected storm erupted, washing away the mountain road, and he would have perished had the cat not caused him to stop. Out of gratitude, the samurai provided continuous donations to the temple that had been struggling financially. The cat became the temple's symbol and brought them continuous good fortune. Today, the temple attracts tourists from all over Japan and the world.

NEMURI-NEKO

This "Nemuri-neko," or "sleeping cat" is an earthenware piece with enamel overglazes adorned with multicolored and gilded decorations, a type of pottery often referred to as Satsuma ware. Satsuma ware pieces were originally developed in Japan during the seventeenth century.

The "sleeping cat" is another popular cat figure in Japanese culture. It is based on a famous wood carving by Hidari Jingoro located at Toshogu Shrine in Nikko above the Kuguri-mon Gate amidst the sacred mountain shrines and temples. Jingoro loved cats and was fascinated by them. He spent eight months in seclusion studying, sculpturing, and carving wooden cats that appeared lifelike in various shapes. His sleeping cat carving is a highly acclaimed National Treasure. Nemuri Neko symbolizes "Nikko" which is the Spirit of "Ieyasu", thought to be the manifestation of Yakusi Nyorai", the Buddha of Healing, giving nourishment to the mind, body, and spirit.

GERMANY

STEIFF

Margarete Steiff GmbH, headquartered in the small town of Giengen, Germany, is the oldest and most famous stuffed toy manufacturer in the world. Margarete Steiff contracted polio when she was 18 months old and spent the rest of her life in a wheelchair. However, this courageous young woman did not let her life be defined by her disability. She learned to sew and soon became a very skilled seamstress. In 1880, Margarete founded her own company, and she was joined in 1897 by her nephew, Richard Steiff, a talented artist who designed the first jointed teddy bear in 1902. These bears, gifted with movement, took the world by storm.

Although the company makes a wide variety of animals, another favorite is their family of cats with names such as Susi, Dossy, Lizzy, Fiffy, Floppy, Tapsy, and of course, Kitty. Featured here are three Susi variations from the 1950's, along with a Dossy and Kitty from the 1980's. Earlier animals were typically made of mohair,

but today a high quality plush is more commonly used, with mohair being reserved for special limited edition creations.

The company motto is “Für Kinder ist nur das Beste gut genug”, translated “Only the best is good enough for our children.” At auction, Steiff collector's items can fetch exceptional prices, often into the tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Louis Vuitton bear, a unique piece, sold for \$2.1 million in 2000 in Monaco.

CHINA

This cat family illustrates the Chinese art of cloisonné. Cloisonné is the technique of creating designs on metal vessels with colored-glass paste placed within enclosures made of copper or bronze wires, which have been bent or hammered into the desired pattern. Known as cloisons (French for “partitions”), the enclosures generally are either pasted or soldered onto the metal body. The glass paste, or enamel, is colored with metallic oxide and painted into the contained areas of the design.

In ancient China, the rich and poor both kept cats, although for different reasons. They were beloved companions for the nobility and a practical means of pest control for the ordinary folk. In fact, Chinese farmers worshipped a cat deity, Li Shou, a fertility goddess who protected crops from rats and drove away evil spirits.

The Legend of Li Shou

In Chinese mythology, the gods initially put cats in charge of the world after they created it. Li Shou was the leader of the cats. The gods gave cats the ability to talk so that they could better rule the other creatures. But the cats had other ideas. They lazed about in the sun, enjoying catnip and chasing mice. Twice the gods chastised Li Shou and her cats to be more responsible. In the end, Li Shou suggested to the gods that humans seemed to be more interested in running things and that cats would rather just enjoy the world. The gods agreed and this is how humans gained the power of speech and took over the world. Although, ask any cat person and they will still tell you that cats are the real masters!

RUSSIA

This cat whistle (the whistle end is the cat's tail) is a Russian Dymkovo toy. Dymkovo toys are moulded, hand-painted clay figures of people and animals, often in the form of a pennywhistle. It is one of the old Russian folk art handicrafts which still exists in the village of Dymkovo.. Traditionally, the Dymkovo toys are

made by women.

Russians love cats. Russia has the highest percentage of cat ownership in the world. 59 % of Russians own at least one cat versus 29% of Americans. In Russia, cats have long been on a high pedestal, since the reign of Empress Elizabeth in the 1700s, where felines prized for their mouse-catching abilities were brought to the palace to live pampered lives. Historically-speaking, the Russian Orthodox Church greatly appreciated cats and thought of them as benevolent guardians, as opposed to the Catholic Church where, during the Dark Ages, cats were thought to be possessed by malevolent spirits. In modern times, cats have gained great favor among Russian pet lovers since they're apartment-friendly and require little to no maintenance.

Matryoshka

To non-Russians, the matryoshka doll is one of the most quintessential representations of traditional Russian peasant life. Also known as stacking dolls, nesting dolls, or Russian tea dolls, the first matryoshka doll was created in 1892. The basic design has changed little in over 100 years. It is a hand-painted wooden doll, almost perfectly cylindrical, which opens to reveal a smaller doll, which opens in turn to reveal yet another smaller doll, and so on. The first matryoshka was painted as a peasant woman in a traditional sarafan dress holding a rooster. Today, matryoshkas are painted as animals, such as this set of stacking cat dolls, and almost anything else including caricatures of politicians, musicians, athletes, astronauts, and popular movie stars.

UNITED STATES

Cats are hailed as pets that can soothe and bring calm, which is why places such as cat cafés — where anyone can go and pet a cat while having a soothing drink — are so popular wherever they open. Studies have found that people who spend time with cats report feeling calmer. “Sitting with a relaxed purring cat is a soothing massage for the soul,” explains researcher Dr. Beth Skillings. “The vibration frequency of a cat’s purr is in the range that can stimulate healing.”

For centuries, cats have also served another important role — as inspiration for a variety of artists worldwide, more recently, Taylor Swift, Karl Lagerfeld, Jason Wu, Andy Warhol (cat faces), Pablo Picasso (cat with bird), Michael Simon (cat purse with handle), Laurel Burch (cat shirt and socks), and Jim Shore (cat figurine).

ROYAL COPLEY

Royal Copley china was made by the Spaulding China Company of Sebring, Ohio, from 1939 to 1960. The best known pieces are the figural planters (such as this cat playing with a ball of yarn) and the small figurines, especially those with Art Deco designs. Originally sold in five-and-ten-cent stores during the 1940s and 1950s, expertly decorated Royal Copley pottery is known for its unique patina of warm colors.

BEANIE BABIES

Okay, who doesn't have at least one (if not a box full!) of these addictive toys? Created in 1993 by American businessman H. Ty Warner, and stuffed with plastic "beans" rather than conventional stuffing, Beanie Babies emerged as a major fad during the second half of the 1990s. They have been cited as being the world's first Internet sensation. Miniatures, called "Teenie Beanies" were offered as McDonald's promotions in Happy Meals. During the peak of their popularity in 1998, Teenie Beanies were the cause of many fights at various McDonald's locations, resulting in police calls, criminal charges, and injuries. Both Beanie Babies and Teenie Beanies were collected not only as toys, but also as an "investment," owing to the high resale value of particular ones. This was driven by the company's strategy of deliberate scarcity, producing each new design in limited quantity, restricting individual store shipments, and regularly retiring designs which created a huge secondary market.

KLIBAN CATS

Bernard "Hap" Kliban (1935 – 1990) was an American cartoonist known for his illustrations of black and white cats with ridiculous behavior. Kliban used a cast of feline characters to express his whimsical sense of humor and "purr-fectly" captured in colorful cartoons the ever-confident-if occasionally ridiculous-behavior of cats. His first book, "Cat," published in 1975, led to several other popular books, and his cartoons have adorned many products including stickers, calendars, t-shirts, and a wide range of mugs and other ceramic collectibles like the ones you see here.

VIRGINIA

This “Bob Cat” tray was made by Virginia Metalcrafters, a company famous for its fine sand-cast decorative items. Located in Waynesboro, Virginia, on the western slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley, Virginia Metalcrafters manufactured a broad line of collectible gifts and decorative accessories and supplied the brassware for Colonial Williamsburg for decades. Products were hand cast in brass, iron, aluminum, bronze, "white bronze" and pewter using the same methods that had been employed since the company was founded over 100 years ago. The company operated from 1890 until 2006.

THE INTERNET

Dogs may be described as man’s best friend, but the Internet apparently didn't get the memo! “Cats” is one of the most-searched-for terms on the Internet, and YouTube videos starring felines account for more than 26 billion views, making them the single most popular category on the site. “Lolcats” — humorous cat photos captioned with poorly spelled catspeak — remain ever popular, and then there are the many cat stars of the online world such as Grumpy Cat, Maru,, Nala, and Lil Bub who have inspired everything from lines of plush toys to non-profit organizations devoted to animal health.

LIL BUB was an American celebrity cat known for her unique appearance resulting from several congenital genetic anomalies. A perma-kitten, Bub’s droopy tongue and “eyes that could vacuum in your soul” made her one of the internet’s most beloved feline celebrities. Bub’s owner started a national fund for special needs pets, and Lil Bub’s Big Fund had helped raise more than \$700,000 for animal organizations.

Grumpy Cat was known for her permanently "grumpy" facial appearance, which was caused by an underbite and feline dwarfism. When her frowning face was shared on the internet, a star and popular meme was born.