

Black Dolls (Kansas City, 6–7 Feb 25)

The National Museum of Toys and Miniatures, Kansas City, MO, Feb 6–07, 2025

Deadline: Oct 14, 2024

Ashley Elston, Berea College

The National Museum of Toys and Miniatures announces a research symposium on the historical significance of Black dolls in America, c. 1850-present. This symposium is part of programming for the exhibition *Portraits of Childhood: Black Dolls from the Collection of Deborah Neff*, on view through March 3, 2025.

Dr. Tiya Miles, Michael Garvey Professor of History and Radcliffe Alumnae Professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, will serve as the keynote speaker for the symposium.

Portraits of Childhood: Black Dolls from the Collection of Deborah Neff explores themes of race, gender, and identity through 135 handmade Black dolls dating from around 1850 to 1940, almost 60 period photographs and paintings depicting dolls posed alongside both children and adults, and a selection of more recent Black dolls from the Museum's collection. Research topics could include any aspect of the history of Black dolls in America. Some topics to consider include the following:

- How were they made? Who made them? What evidence do we have to indicate this?
- Who was the primary audience? Were they given away as gifts? Traded? Purchased? Passed down within families?
- How do handmade Black dolls provide insight into historical and contemporary issues of race, gender, and/or identity?
 - o How do Black dolls reflect these issues both visually and through their display and use?
 - o How have Black dolls contributed to shaping these issues?
- In what ways did introducing manufactured Black dolls change their function and audience? Where were they sold? How were they advertised? Who was their primary audience?
- How have the function and meaning of Black dolls evolved and stayed the same?

The Museum plans to publish selected scholarship from the symposium in a peer-reviewed edited volume with an academic press.

To apply: Please submit your name, title, institutional affiliation (if applicable), presentation title, and a 250-300 word abstract for a 20-minute presentation to Dr. Madeline Rislow (Curator / Sr. Manager of Learning & Engagement) rislowm@toyandminiaturemuseum.org. Advanced undergraduates are welcome to apply for a focused student session.

A limited number of research grants are available to support original research on the exhibition. Please see below for further details.

Deadline: October 14, 2024. Applicants will receive a decision by the end of October.

Portraits of Childhood Exhibition Research Grants

Scholars are invited to apply for Research Grants up to \$3,000 to support their study of the Portraits of Childhood: Black Dolls from the Collection of Deborah Neff exhibition and participation in the related symposium.

Grantees are required to travel to Kansas City twice:

1. Fall 2024: View and study the exhibition in person.
2. February 6-7, 2025: Participate in a research symposium on the exhibition, including a presentation of original research.

To apply: Please submit a project title, 300-600 word statement of your intended research focus, a travel budget, and a CV to Dr. Madeline Rislow (Curator / Sr. Manager of Learning & Engagement) rislowm@toyandminiaturemuseum.org

Deadline: September 4, 2024. Applicants will receive a decision by mid-September. Grant proposals may be considered after the deadline. Contact the curator for additional details.

For more information on Deborah Neff's collection, please see the following links:

- STITCH IN TIME – Artforum
- Ellen McDermott photographs Deborah Neff's collection of black dolls in the book, Black Dolls. ([slate.com](https://www.slate.com))
- La Maison Rouge Gallery Opens "Black Dolls: The Deborah Neff Collection" | Vogue
- Black Dolls Tell a Story of Play—and Resistance—in America | Smart News | Smithsonian Magazine
- Encountering Ghosts in Family Photos, Historical Dolls, and 'Black Panther' | The Nation
- What the Black Dolls Say | The Nation

Reference:

CFP: Black Dolls (Kansas City, 6-7 Feb 25). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 8, 2024 (accessed Jun 11, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/42536>>.