

# Making of the Wizard of Oz Puppets

by Michael Baroto

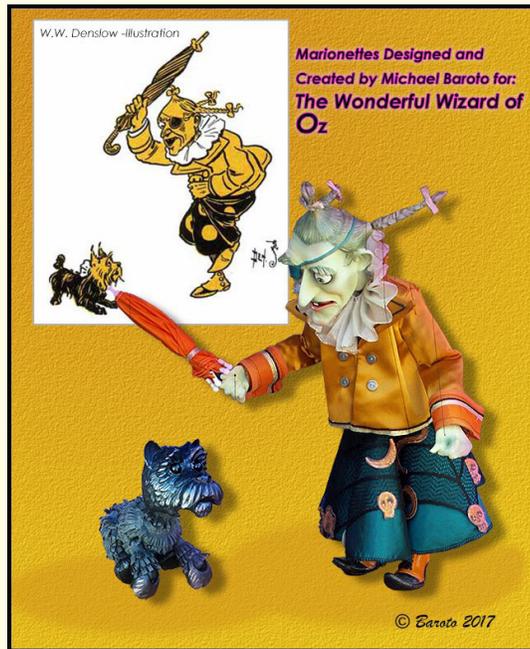
If it can be said, that Dorothy Gale's journey down the yellow brick road was met with turmoil and apprehension, then this is not unlike the challenges I faced in bringing the W.W. Denslow, illustrations, from *The Wizard of Oz*, to life. Of the dozen or so characters I created for 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz' the Wicked Witch of the West, would keep my imagination working overtime, rethinking my choices, and at times push me to near exhaustion. What I would discover during the creative process however, made all of the delays worth it. All of the second guessing and mental gyrations I was going through led to more revelation, and when I was done, what I saw staring back at me through the camera lens told me I achieved my goal.

The visual look of the Wicked Witch of the West had, for many years, confounded me. Having grown up, like most of us, watching the MGM movie with the

character portrayed in the film by Margaret Hamilton, to near perfection, it was obvious her appearance and demeanor were drastically altered from the original set down by Denslow. Regardless of the challenges, something was beckoning me to give it a try. Initially, upon rereading the novel, I realized the figure's palette needed to predominantly favor the color yellow. She was living in the middle of Winkie country. At the time, I remember writing one of the Oz blogs, asking if there was any indication as to whether her skin tone was yellow as well. There was none, although, the fellow I was conversing with thought it was an interesting concept. I decided however, that her skin should have a yellowish cast to it, as evident in the palest pallor and shades of yellow-green. What perplexed me the most were the choices Denslow had made for the Wicked Witch of the West's costume. Was this some deliberate offbeat humor, chosen to soften the violent



nature of the character's dialog? We will never know, but I knew for sure she would captivate me until the very end, long after she was shipped, and I had gone on to other things. Then one day during this mystery, it struck me; I decided to study the time Denslow lived, looking for clues in whatever photographic evidence I could find. My theory here, was partly based on my own working methods, and those of other contemporary artists. I proceeded to research the latter half of the 19th century, looking for clues. One day, while researching the detail work on Dorothy's costume, I found a group photo of school children, getting their picture taken. There among the grouping I started to see the particular details of the dress, and further evidence of a sailor jacket motif, in somber hues, but I needed more. On a subsequent search I would hit pay dirt. A formal picture of two boys photographed together wearing high button shoes and double-breasted jackets, and one of a little girl photographed with her father, affluent, and proud, and wearing the exact or as close to a near perfect jacket, with its broad lapels, sailor collar, and skirt. This was it. Now, I was almost certain Denslow must have seen this type of wardrobe in his day-to-day travels. Turning to the illustration I was now engaged in a way that made the almost impossible, possible. I decided on a color palette as well. Since the jacket projected a strong contrast against the darkened skirt, I decided



this would reflect Winkie yellow, golden-yellow, reflecting her position of power and possession of the golden cap used to call the Winged Monkeys. I continued making my color choices avoiding black for the skirt. What I learned early in my artistic career was that black was the absence of color, reserved in the theater for its ability to disappear. I needed an accent color to the yellow, and chose a teal for the skirt. The fabric, a combination of blue and emerald, was an iridescent, upon which the appliques and netting would provide a stark contrast for the design. With all of these elements in place I was confident enough to precede with the marionette. The work was methodical, like most of the figures in the series. First, the head was sculpted, then the molds, finally analysis of the body, the detail and final execution. On April, 2012, the figure of the Wicked Witch of the West was completed.

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