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KOVELS ANTIQUES AND COLLECTING

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PHOTO CREDIT: Fox Auctions

PHOTO CAPTION: Happy Halloween! Time to
raise a toast to all things spooky.

Memento Mori

What could be creepier than drinking out of a skull? Porcelain manufacturers in Germany have been making skull-shaped steins for hundreds of years. The one pictured here, which sold for \$343 at Fox Auctions, was created by Ernst Bohne Sohne. This company started as a decorating studio in 1848 and was taken over by Geb-ruder Heubach, famous for their porcelain dolls, about 1919.

As popular as skull steins were, they were traditionally meant for a different occasion than Halloween and carried a meaning that was more moralistic than morbid. Notice that the skull rests on a book, a common design. They were graduation gifts for students, and not just medical students. They were a form of memento mori, a reminder that, because death comes for everyone, it is important to live a life of virtue — or, in this case, to take the opportunity to celebrate when you can.

Like most skull-on-book signs, the book is marked “Gaudeamus Igitur,” from a popular graduation song whose line “Gaudeamus igitur, juvenes dum sumus” translates to “Let us rejoice while we are young.” While it’s especially appropriate for graduation ceremonies, the idea of “rejoicing while we’re young” isn’t out of place on Halloween. It sounds like a pretty good way to describe trick-or-treating.

Q: My aunt was in the army in the 1940s and traveled the world her whole life. She picked up two dolls in the 1950s or so, and I have them today. They are dressed in traditional clothing from around the world and are about 12 inches tall and in good condition. Can you tell me more about them?

A: Dolls dressed in folk costumes were popular souvenirs in the mid-20th century. Many American service members, like your aunt, picked them

up in Europe as souvenirs for family back home. Many companies throughout Europe made dolls like these, and the most famous ones can be recognized by their distinctive styles and materials, like Lenci (Italy) and Ravca (France), which made cloth dolls, and Gura (Germany), which used composition or plastic.

Unfortunately, many dollmakers worked in similar styles, and mid-century European dolls were not always marked so it can be hard to identify a maker. Even if you can’t find a maker, collectors are interested in dolls like yours. There are many resources available for collectors, including print and online identification guides; clubs like the United Federation of Doll Clubs (ufdc.org), and doll auctions like Frasher’s and Theriault’s. Without a known maker, your dolls are probably worth

about \$50 or less. A doll club, auction, or dealer may help you find more specific information and a more accurate price.

TIP: Be careful where you put a fresh pumpkin or gourd at Halloween or Thanksgiving. Put a plastic liner underneath it. A rotting pumpkin will permanently stain wood or marble.

CURRENT PRICES

Halloween, candy bucket, witch, round, orange and black, molded face, black handle, plastic, Topstone, 1960s, 7 inches, \$40.

Costume, Spider-Man, mask, suit, box, Ben Cooper, 1973, medium, \$150.

Blenko, jack-o’-lantern, orange glass, applied features, white eyes, nose and eyebrow, red mouth, disc top with stem, 12 x 8 inches, \$840.

For more collecting news, tips and resources, visit www.Kovels.com

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