

Lady head vases from the outstanding collection of Maddy Gordon will be sold online, July 22, by Strawser Auction Group

The auction will feature 214 lots, with names such as Lefton, Inarco, Relpo, Napco and many others. Bidding starts at just \$1 for each lady head vase on offer.

WOLCOTTVILLE, INDIANA, UNITED STATES, July 8, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The first in a series of online-only auctions dedicated to the [lady head vase collection](#) of [Maddy Gordon](#) is slated for Monday, July 22nd, starting at 6 pm Eastern time, by Strawser Auction Group. Bidding will be handled exclusively through HiBid.com. This first sale will feature 214 lots of lady head vases. Bidding will start at just \$1 for each vase up for bid.

To view the catalog, click this link: <https://strawserauctions.hibid.com/catalog/557916/july-22-2024-online-head-vase-auction>



Napco lady head vase with glass hat, 6 inches tall. Estimate: \$400-\$600; minimum bid \$1.

Ms. Gordon's collection, in its entirety, comprises more than 3,000 head vases. It will require up to seven auctions and several years to liquidate all of it. The [makers include names such as Lefton, Inarco, Relpo, Napco and many others](#). All are wonderful representations of the figural vases in the form of a head (or bust) of a woman that have captivated collectors for decades.

Ms. Gordon isn't just a collector. She's written books and articles on the subject, and was the founder of the Head Hunters Newsletter and organizer of the annual Head Vase Conventions in Kissimmee, Florida for many years. She became a huge fan of America's first head vase creator, Betty Lou Nichols, and authored the book, *Head Vases, Etc., The Artistry of Betty Lou Nichols*.

An article in Kovel's Antique Trader stated that lady head vases "exude glamour with their perfectly coiffed hairdos, big lush eyelashes and ruby lips, elegant fashions, and sometimes adorned with pearls or other jewelry, a stylish hat or gloves - or sometimes all three accessories."

Maddy Gordon, a New Yorker all her life, was the daughter of serious antique collectors and, through her training as a medical and psychiatric social worker, was well-equipped to recognize and appreciate the nuances of facial expressions. Not surprisingly, then, she became interested in lady head vases when they first began appearing at shows, shops and flea markets years ago.

While some people limit their collections to beautiful ladies, Maddy has been attracted to the whole universe, one that includes babies, animals, clowns, Madonnas, children, nurses, brides, and characters like Uncle Sam. Some are not vases at all but ashtrays, lipstick holders, head lamps and more. It's estimated over 10,000 different varieties of head vases have been made.



Napco lady head vase with glass hat, 6 inches tall. Estimate: \$400-\$600; minimum bid \$1.

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Michael Strawser

Celebrity head vases have even crept into the mix over the years. Ones created in the likeness of Marilyn Monroe, Lucille Ball, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Grace Kelly, Carmen Miranda and others have found their way into collections. These can include males, too, like Elvis Presley, but those are less common. A 1964 Jackie Kennedy head vase by Inarco sold for just under \$1,000.

And now, a bit of history: lady head vases first appeared in Europe in the 19th century, with the earliest American examples not arriving on the scene until the 1930s. Lady head vases were often made in Japan after World War II, by

companies like Enesco, Inarco, Lefton, Napco, Reubens and Relpo. American makers included Betty Lou Nichols, Royal Copley, Ceramic Arts Studio, Shawnee Pottery and Henry Holt. These could be purchased cheaply in packs of 6 or 12.

Florist companies produced the head vases as a marketing gimmick to sell small bouquets, which is why so many ended up in American homes in the 1950s and '60s. Retailers like Woolworth's also sold them. By the 1970s thousands of different kinds of head vases were made, which led to a glut in the market, a decrease in demand, the end of the craze and a discontinuation of product.

Fast forward to the new millennium, where a fresh crop of appreciative collectors rediscovered lady head vases for the diminutive treasures that they are. Most range in size from 2-14 inches, although most are seven inches or less. Some collectors have put them to work, filling them with flowers or other artful arrangements, using them to hold beauty supplies, or even to hold pens.

While all the lady head vases in Maddy Gordon's collection are authentic and true to the period, collectors need to know there are reproductions in the market that are sold mainly in gift shops throughout the county. Most recent pieces are easy to distinguish from their older counterparts, but buyers are still encouraged to purchase from reputable antique dealers and trusted collectors.



Relco lady head vase with one earring missing, 7 ½ inches tall. Estimate: \$400-\$600; minimum bid \$1.

As mentioned, Betty Lou Nichols is credited with sparking the lady head vase craze in the U.S., and pieces by her are highly sought after today by collectors. She began making her creations in the 1940s with clay and a rolling pin, on her parents' kitchen table. She opened her first ceramics studio in 1945. She was the only maker to add handmade details, such as ruffles, lace and bows.

Betty Lou Nichols head vases are distinctive and tend to represent women in the Gay '90s style, with big hats and big curls, perfect cheekbones and skin. The trademark Betty Lou look includes eyelashes lowered "in perpetual coquetry." There are no Betty Lou Nichols lady head vases in the Part 1 sale of the Maddy Gordon collection, but there may be some offered in future auctions.

There is a wide variety of styles of head vases in the world: plain women, tribal women, and women in their Sunday best. Many have realistic facial features, with eyes open or closed, with chic accessories like pearl necklaces with matching dangling earrings or other jewelry and stylish hats. Some have a perfectly manicured hand that frames a side of their face or a gloved hand.

There is also a variety of hairdos, including curls, updos, long hair, bouffants, and short, sassy

styles, sometimes adorned with ceramic flowers or ribbons. Necklines also vary. Head vases can be collected by makers, specific sizes, or themes, such as brunettes, those wearing hats, or those with hands. Vases with teenage faces, from the 1960s, are not as common as the adult versions.

As for pricing, lady head vases can be found for between \$10 to \$1,000 and even more, depending on rarity. It's easy to start collecting head vases, since many can be found at antique shops or online in the \$10 to \$50 range. Ruby Lane has a variety ranging from \$17 to \$2,600. You could also get lucky and find one for far less at a yard sale, flea market, or thrift store.

Many collectors are willing to pay \$50 or more for a head vase they don't have yet, even if it's not rare or a celebrity. Head vases, like all collectibles, fluctuate in value. It's always a good idea to buy head vases that are in good shape, with little or no crazing, chips, or breaks, since the condition adds to the value. And also, as usual, when it comes to collectibles, buy what you like.

Makers like Napco, Enesco, Nichols and other manufacturers included a maker's mark on the bottoms of their pieces. Other companies included a paper label or foil sticker that, over time, wore away. Not every head vase is marked, but that doesn't necessarily make it less valuable or collectible. Sellers, as a general rule, include a photo of the mark on the bottom of the piece.

Michael Strawser operates the most experienced and trusted auction house for majolica. The Strawser Auction Group has handled many of the greatest majolica collections and sold items to the biggest collectors in the world. Mr. Strawser was the founder of the Majolica International Society and served as its very first president at the organization's inception.

To learn more about Strawser Auction Group and the first in a series of online-only auctions dedicated to the lady head vase collection of Maddy Gordon, slated for Monday, July 22nd, visit www.strawserauctions.com. Updates are posted often. You can reach Strawser Auction Group by phone at 260-854-2859 or 260-336-2204; or via email, at michael@strawserauctions.com.

Some information for the writing of this story first appeared in an article in Kovel's Antique Trader, titled Lady Head Vases: Ten Things You Didn't Know. To read the article, click this link: <https://www.antiquetrader.com/collectibles/lady-head-vases-10-things-you-didnt-know>.



Relco lady head vase, 7 inches tall, having a nick to the base of the rim. Estimate: \$400-\$600; minimum bid \$1.

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Royal Crown Japan lady head vase
3477, 7 inches tall. Estimate: \$400-
\$600; minimum bid \$1.

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