



SEPTEMBER 2011

## A Chair with Party Shoes

Tom Miller | *Mama's Little Rock and Roll Baby*



**VISIT THE BMA**  
and see Tom Miller's  
*Jungle Chest, Mardi  
Gras King, and  
Mama's Little Rock  
and Roll Baby.*

Tom Miller (American, 1945-2000). Detail, *Mama's Little Rock and Roll Baby*. 1991. Acrylic on wood, resin, bells, patent leather shoes, cotton socks. 26 x 14 x 20 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Promised gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in Memory of the Artist, BMA R.16679. Photo by Mitro Hood.

What a funny idea! A rocking chair wearing party shoes and socks! Children love this little chair with a bright red slice of watermelon on top.

*Mama's Little Rock and Roll Baby* probably started out as a plain brown chair built by a workman in a furniture factory. After years of use, it became marred and scratched, and maybe even broken. Eventually it was forgotten in somebody's basement, or sent to a thrift shop, or abandoned in a dumpster on the street.

This was just the kind of chair that Tom Miller liked to rescue. With his cheerful bright paints and lively imagination he went about "hiding the hurt" (as he said), covering up all the nicks and scars with dots and speckles, wiggly lines, zebra stripes, and patterns that you might find on the skin of a giraffe. He painted a graceful gazelle running across the chair seat and attached a row of bells that jingle when a child rocks back and forth. Still he wasn't finished. "If the chair has legs, then it should have feet and shoes," Miller said. So he added dress-up shoes like the Mary Janes his little sister had worn on Sundays when they were growing up.

Tom Miller made lots of chairs that made people smile. Some wear bowling shoes or roller skates. Some have lampshades for heads! With paint and brush, Tom Miller brought broken old chairs, tables, chests, and cabinets back to life by painting pictures of elephants, palm trees, flowers, cats, fish, and gorgeous birds all over them. Giving a tired old piece of furniture a bright new look was one of his greatest pleasures.

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

When Tom Miller was a Baltimore City art teacher, he asked his students to make art out of "found materials" that cost nothing. Find a worn-out object that nobody wants anymore. Fix it up with new colors, new cloth, new designs, or whatever it takes to make it seem fresh again. If you can't work on a real object, draw or paint a picture of your object to show how you would like it to look.

Use the Art-To-Go archive to compare *Mama's Little Rock and Roll Baby* with *50 Dozen* (September 2009) and *Grecian Couch* (December 2008).



To comment or register  
for Art-To-Go, email  
Landre@artbma.org

For visitor information:  
artbma.org

**PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**



BALTIMORE  
MUSEUM OF  
ART **BMA**

Tom Miller. *Mama's Little Rock and Roll Baby*.

1991. Acrylic on wood, resin, bells, patent leather shoes, cotton socks. 26 x 14 x 20 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Promised gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in Memory of the Artist, BMA R.16679. Photo by Mitro Hood.