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doll makers

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

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„ The Art of the Doll Maker „
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, Akiko Anzai ,

Well, when I think back I have been interested in people since I was 4 or 5 years old. I remember drawing figures when I had any piece of paper and pencil. It was my play. I think I was a really easy child for my parents. I was quiet and happy when I drew. I could pass the hours doing that.

When I was a teenager my mother took a doll making class. It was a primitive type of cloth dolls, but it fascinated me! I was just watching her make dolls. I was a good critic too. Years passed by and I stopped playing with dolls and drawing. When I bought my first house and ran out of money to decorate it, I thought that I should make something for the house. That's how doll making came back to me. That was some 18 years ago. I have been playing with dolls ever since.

Doll making to me is a search for friends I cannot find in the real world. I guess I'm a loner by nature. I always feel like people do not quite understand me. It's difficult to explain myself, but when I make a doll, I put so much of my feelings and desires into it that it's not necessary to explain myself to my doll. It absorbs me. The doll I make is somebody that understands me best because it has something of me in it. I'm happy that something inside me finally emerges in a form of a doll.

Well, it is weird, isn't it? I reckon that there is a danger in it because more and more, I like to retire into an unrealistic world.

, elinor peace bailey ,

I was born in the Midwest and raised in Scarsdale, New York, just outside the city. This afforded me an extraordinary education. At sixteen I was able to attend Parson's School of Design, and later the Art Students League and continued my schooling at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. There I received my BS Degree and completed one year of graduate work. I married fellow student, Gary Bailey, a gifted musician and teacher, and together we have raised ten children. Books I have authored include "Mother Plays with Dolls" and "The Rag Doll from Plain to Fancy," and I have published and marketed my own line of over fifty doll patterns and books on doll face painting, doll hair and wearable dolls.

I have a deep conviction that dolls can be used as tools to communicate with people and that the process of making dolls can help the doll maker reclaim lost portions of themselves. I see doll making as artistically liberating. My passion for promoting the experience of doll making has led to my founding the Association of People Who Play With Dolls. Through this association, I publish a quarterly newsletter that focuses on "networking and nonsense." It encourages the doll world to evolve into a safe and nurturing place for the inner child to take up residence. To this end I continually reach out to people throughout the world.

Touching the hearts of creative and loving women has been my strongest motivation, and I have been greatly rewarded by the continuing kindness of those whom I have entertained and taught.

, Evon Beams ,

I have been a doll collector since 1968. My collection includes dolls from all over the world. I made my first doll in 1976 and her expression is one of sadness. I have kept her in my collection as a constant reminder of how far I have grown in my life and as a doll maker.

Every time I take a class or learn something new, I am invigorated and revitalized. I am always searching for new ideas and techniques, so I can create the best dolls that I am capable of making. My personal quest is to learn more every day about my art and about the ideas and lives of the other doll makers I have come to know and love.

In 1991, a friend introduced me to the Flying Phoebe Cloth Doll Club and the world of doll makers. I've become a changed person since going to that first Flying Phoebe Doll Show in September of 1991. I am constantly learning new doll making techniques. I have made dolls from many mediums including cloth, porcelain, cernet, wood, felt and paper.

I have won 30 awards for my doll making in competitions in and around Hayward, California. My life's goal is to have a gallery and studio where people can come to learn the art of doll making and display their work.

, Floyd J. Bell ,

Belle Dolls came to life in 1979 when I began hand-carving my creations to prove to my wife, Sandra (then a collector of Madame Alexander dolls), that I could design dolls of fine quality. Being a self-taught doll artisan, I began to enter my creations in local, then national doll artist competitions, taking away a number of blue ribbons. In 1991 I became a doll artist member of the prestigious National Institute of American Doll Artists (NIADA).

I teach industrial arts, specializing in wood working, at Westchester High School in Los Angeles, California. One day I began sculpting a human figure from scraps of wood found in my workshop. The purpose was to demonstrate to my students what could be created by using their imagination along with the skills they had acquired. Soon, many of the students in my woodworking classes were busy using their imagination and skills to create their own doll figures.

Using doll making as an enticement, I feel I have stimulated a new interest in many of my students, many of whom are underprivileged inner city youths. In 1994, with help from my family and colleagues, I founded the Floyd Bell Scholarship Foundation. This foundation has provided over \$10,000 in

scholarship funds to underprivileged youths as assistance toward their college education.

Much of my time is spent creating hand-carved figures depicted in the fashion of their time. These exquisite figurines are of great men and women who made contributions in the arts, politics, science and music. Most of my creations are of people who made a difference in the lives of Americans today. They are great tributes to those that make up our American Heritage legacy.

My creations are found in many of the famous collections of the world. The Louvre Museum in Paris, France, the Wanke Doll Museum in Germany and the Musée de Poupées collection in Morbihan, France have examples of my work in their permanent collections.

, Akira Blount ,

I began doll making 30 years ago in response to my children's need for toys. I soon realized that I was excited and fascinated by the process and the results. Even more intriguing was the response that these little human effigies brought from others. Those responses ranged from disgust to intrigue, from boredom to fascination. What has remained important is the personal journeys these "small people" have taken me on.

I have always worked in cloth because of a love of textiles and my comfort with a needle and thread. I learned to sew at the knee of my grandmother, who seemed to enjoy sharing her skills as much as I enjoyed learning. She introduced me to fabric, and I costumed my dolls with her assistance from an early age. In hindsight, it seems that doll making was a natural fit for me.

In addition to cloth, I have enjoyed using natural materials in my work. These include pinecones, acorns, roots and twigs, as well as leather, feathers, etc. These pieces give a doll an elemental quality—something that is very much a part of nature—imbued with spirit. Other materials I use are acrylic paints, colored pencils, antique buttons, lace and beads. Doll making is wonderful because of the variety of materials that can be incorporated into a single piece.

, Olga Dvigoubsky Cinnamon ,

My beginnings as a fiber artist can be traced back three generations. I grew up surrounded by fabric, yarn, knitting needles, crochet hooks, sewing machines and other implements used to create works in fiber.

Being raised in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual household, traveling to art centers in Western Europe and Native American locales in North America, as well as pursuing studies in history, women's culture and ethnicity have helped shape my thoughts about people and places in our world. These

experiences have, in turn, affected the way I choose to reinterpret traditional media into non-traditional forms.

I have always loved dolls. . .playing with them and having them for comfort. Actually, I love the figurative in any art form. I am especially drawn to the female form—women and women's culture are wonderful. There are so many beautiful stories to be re-told and shared.

I make dolls as a way for me to share stories and am inspired by my own emotions, personal relationships and all the daily "stuff" of life. Stories are told through colors, shapes and Goddess symbols incorporated in the doll bodies or forms. I live in the moment. Some days I feel a bit wild and happy so the dolls I create are bold and lively. When I feel sad and my heart is aching, the dolls appear more serious and somber. However, they are always powerful. They are asymmetrical. . .not perfect, just as people are not perfect. I focus on the beauty contained within people's hearts and emotions on the exterior of my dolls with textural, colorful beads made of glass, metal, shells, wood and bone.

, Patti Medaris Culea ,

I was raised on a farm in the mid-west surrounded by creative people. My uncle was an original animator for Walt Disney. A cousin painted murals in New York City (one is still at La Guardia airport). Another uncle had a big band at the Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. Both my mother and my father are artists, and they have seen me carry on the family tradition.

I always studied art throughout grade school, junior high school, high school, college and beyond. While working as a flight attendant in Phoenix and Japan, I studied art under various masters. After painting portraits for several years, I began experimenting with fibers. Having two daughters has helped me focus more on the human figure in cloth.

While my daughters were growing up, I started looking for more advanced cloth doll patterns. This is what led me to create my own style. My love of color also led me to study dyes and paints. I now dye most of the fabrics for my own art dolls.

Probably the most important part of my development as a doll designer is the joy it brings to myself and everyone around me. I strive to create joy through the colors I use and the faces I create. I travel the world teaching my techniques. I pinch myself daily for the ability to share this joy with so many others.

, Kooki Davis ,

Born in the West Indies, it seemed only natural to tell stories and create dolls that draw from my Caribbean background. Meeting doll artists like Mary Thomas, Elinor Peace Bailey and others has inspired me to make fine art

dolls. With colorful skin tones and traditional dolls in unique costumes, the Kooki Kollection expresses humor, cultural diversity and fantasy.

My commitment is to make the best possible doll that encompasses the attitude of a contemporary black woman and appeals to the every-changing trends in the market.

, Dru Esslinger ,

Esslinger Kids are the soft sculpture dolls I make in Madison, Kansas. Since their creation, they have come to portray something more than just dolls. They are an outgrowth of a need to fulfill the emptiness left by the loss of my oldest daughter, the ending of 30 years as an elementary school teacher and the loss of my mother.

My dolls have become the means by which my whole family can work together and in which I have made numerous friends throughout the whole world.

Living in a German farm and ranch community and being involved in church, school, 4-H and the many other activities of a small rural town on the edge of the Flint Hills has provided a wealth of material and ideas to develop new doll characters. To have a talented family, which provides the many settings for the dolls, makes the dolls truly a family and community project.

While fabric is the natural choice of material to bring these dolls to life, it has to be the activities of real people that give the dolls their real character. Some of the dolls actually look like the people they are portraying while others just take on the character of the person.

The Esslinger home is the "gallery" as these "small people" intermingle among antiques and family heirlooms. When my five exceptional grand-children arrive for a weekend, the dolls become residents of a large "doll house." The Esslinger Kids can be found in unexpected and interesting places. My studio is open almost 24 hours a day and has never been considered "off limits" for my children or grandchildren. Many treasures abound, and they love to make their own additions to this wonderful and unique treasure chest.

I have always said I am merely the vehicle by which God guides me in producing these "little people." They have provided me with hours of happiness as I visit them. Hopefully, people who purchase my dolls and come to my shows have this same feeling. I am able to spend my days and nights doing what I love most. God has truly blessed me.

, Dan Fletcher ,

I enjoyed a career on the Broadway stage. During my years as a dancer, I also performed and taught dance in Japan. It was while living and teaching in

Tokyo (1984) that I was first introduced to Washi Dolls (Japanese paper dolls). After returning to the States with numerous books and papers, I began teaching myself how to make these wonderful dolls.

After much trial and error over the next two years, I was off to Japan, dolls in hand, to show the established doll makers what I had accomplished. Their reaction was overwhelmingly positive and I returned with many new ideas and techniques.

In 1990, the Japanese Ministry of Education gave me a two-year full scholarship to study costume, papermaking, theater, and, of course, doll making. An unexpected result of this opportunity was the chance to learn the technique for creating Chirimen-gami or Japanese creped paper. This textured paper aids greatly in creating the illusion of fabric. I hold the honor of being the only non-Japanese to have ever achieved a working knowledge of the technique (there are only three practicing craftsmen left in Japan.)

My work is deeply rooted in my experiences as a professional dancer. It was during this period of my life what I was called upon to express, with my body, the essence of that the choreographer was trying to convey about a particular character, role or mood of the piece. Now as a doll artist, I take on the role of choreographer and the dancers are my dolls.

When training to be a dancer we learned a lot about the breath. Not only how to breathe, but how to breathe life into our movement. This understanding of the "breath" translates wonderfully into doll making.

During the process of creating my Washi Dolls, I utilize a combination of techniques to illustrate my perception of the Japanese culture. My work is an ongoing discovery of what I am able to express using Washi.

Washi is one of the most versatile, warm and intriguing substances I have ever worked with. I am truly grateful that the doll that caught my eye and compelled me to try making dolls was made of Washi.

, Sally Lampi ,

I have played with dolls all my life. As I got older and my life became more stressful, I needed to surround myself with happiness. Dolls did just that. Humor was what I needed, and my doll making became my outlet. When I began to find humor in myself and the people around me, life took the direction I needed. I find humor in everything, but especially in what children do and say, and how they look. As I get older I can see humor in my own body as it changes. My dolls reflect this new image. Things start to sag and I get rounder. I learned to love this. People who make my dolls from my patterns see the same things and can laugh about it. Laughing with the world is a good thing. When people see my dolls and smile at them, I know I am doing the right thing. Doll making has taken me all over the world teaching and meeting many great people and doll makers. I am truly blessed.

, Junko M. Liesfeld ,

Each doll that I conceive and carry through to creation is a product of love. With each individual, I seek to portray human emotions and personalities, as well as to express my love of and appreciation for my fellow man. Because details can often obscure true feelings, I prefer simplicity and because of this I sculpt "tiny people" with few details.

To attain simplicity is a difficult task. To acquire the exact emotion I seek with a minimum of sophisticated details requires a skillful manipulation of the medium. The expressions created using subtle changes in the medium allow the feelings to come through more vividly than they would through the use of intricate detail. I seek to capture innocence, serenity and warmth: all that is good in human nature. I create dolls from my experiences and people I know first hand.

The process of portraying intangible emotions of joy, happiness, love, compassion, etc. are difficult to put into physical form, and therefore, each sculpture is another attempt on my part to describe these things. I try to create my dolls in a manner that expresses my feelings, and it is a goal for which I am constantly reaching.

, Lisa Lichtenfels ,

Sitting here, thinking of over 18 years of working in my medium, I wonder how to describe my career? My life is very simple really. I go into my studio every day and work. The time just passes by in an instant much like all these years. It seems like yesterday that I was asking Judy Jambell about her soft sculpture. That was in 1978 when I was a student at the Philadelphia College of Art. At that time, Judy was a famous illustrator. I looked at her work and wondered if the medium could be made truly three dimensional like regular sculptures in a museum. Judy worked flat. The final product was a photograph, so the side that faced the camera was the only important part. It wasn't until my years at the Disney Studios that I solved the problem by applying three dimensional animation principles to the internal support structures. I am still solving technical problems, and the excitement of invention is one of the most satisfying aspects of exploring a new medium.

The other aspect that I love is character. Each sculpture is a person I have met and known. I become them during the time they live in my studio. To infuse raw materials with something that engenders a character seems to be pure magic to me.

I have been a traditional oil painter, a clay sculptor, a professional illustrator and photographer. I am proud to say I worked with Eric Larson as a Disney apprentice animator. He was the best and most talented teacher I ever had. He convinced me that perfection was possible, and gave me the only guiding principle that has lasted all these years: "Make every effort better than the one before, and all else will fall into place."

, Beverly Dodge Radefeld ,

"The Corner in the Middle"

Mother, wife, small business owner and all around good person who makes dolls a prominent part of her life. I use my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree to create dolls that fill my needs and maintain my sanity while running my electronics wholesale business.

My mom taught me to sew. Sewing became a point of connection between the two of us. When I was in high school, I took home economics and learned to read patterns. I was so proud of myself because this was something my mom wasn't able to do, and I had a chance to teach her something new. Together we learned to read the instructions by making stuffed toys from patterns.

In order to stay home with my two babies, I made soft sculptures to illustrate books for a wonderful small bookstore near my home. This was a good opportunity to learn techniques from commercial patterns and develop my own techniques from my own original designs. I continued to create soft sculpture in my free time after I went back to work.

We lost our oldest son, Aaron, to leukemia just before he turned sixteen, and I used the dolls to express my grief. I joined a group of women forming a club called the Pin-Ella-P's and this has given me the opportunity to become an enthusiastic and devoted doll maker. The group, without fail, has been open to exchanging ideas and techniques making all members the best doll makers we want to be.

I use the dolls as a personal challenge and they add balance and sanity to my life. Movement and the expression of my feelings are most important to me when I create a doll and I use all forms of technique to accomplish that goal. My son, Russel, has always been a great help in the creation of the really big challenges.

Our store has gone through a great deal of change lately, and I decided to make a corner for doll supplies. It's my store and I can do what I want. The corner came out in the middle of the store and it has been really surprising how much attention the men have given to this "women's" art. I have to thank my husband, Bob, for not objecting too loudly.

The "corner in the middle" pretty much describes how dolls affect my life. Even though it's just one part of my life, it is in the middle.

, Christine Shively ,

Exploring the possibilities of creating a character with fabric is an extension of a lifetime fascination of three-dimensional forms. My characters emerge from familiar tales of childhood and from stories of the heart and soul. Fabric, color, texture and pattern all play intricate parts in creating interesting figures that tell their own stories to the viewers who meet them.

An ancient connection to doll making and storytelling is ever apparent in my work. I have been making a living with my imagination for sixteen years. Experimenting with new techniques in drawing, painting, beadwork and embroidery; solving structural and aesthetic problems; and educating myself on historical and cultural heritages contribute to the continual growth and change of my figures.

My approach is simple—there are no boundaries—anything is possible. Working across the United States and now into Australia, I have had the opportunity to expand the boundaries of others as well as my own. I always try to visually and verbally dispel the notion that dolls are just “toys for children and nothing more.” Whether teaching doll making classes in Oakland, California, Baltimore, Maryland or to sixth graders in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I stress the importance of being receptive to unexpected inspirations. The turn of a phrase, the use of an ordinary object in an extraordinary way can give personal expression to each piece. Manipulating basic shapes in new and different ways plays an important role in the creation of my characters. As the fabric speaks to me in many voices, the combination of these voices gives life and harmony to the finished figure.

There never seems to be a shortage of subject matter or the motivation to reinterpret well-worn material. Untold numbers of characters are struggling to make their presence known through the interplay of fiber, color, pattern, and texture. Forming these figures is an expression of my desire to share myself creatively and helps me understand myself. It is an extension of who I am.

My first efforts to show my work came in 1983 at the Kansas City Renaissance Festival. Not only was it a good opportunity to combine the storytelling with the figures, but I met Debra Henderson. This extraordinary artist set the standard for quality and unique expression in my beginning doll making. Later, as I became exposed to the wonderful doll artists across the country, I knew that this form of expression had limitless possibilities. The sense of adventure and independence that the venue has given me has helped to expand my horizons artistically and organizationally.

, Jo-Ellen Trilling ,

My dolls, at times both humorous and disturbing, seem to be caught by the viewer when they are doing something they may not wish to be observed doing. They are combined human and animal forms interacting in a tableau—the environment surrounding them—implied by the chair or vehicle upon which they are seated.

I began making cloth and clay toys as a child. They allowed me to bring my imaginary life outside. That hasn't changed. Drawing and painting and being in the world in various ways, have helped me to define the shapes and the attitudes that the dolls express. Now the process of building dolls is the act of playing—each one is different and requires new ways of problem solving. This has become the primary reason for making them, and for teaching.

Myths, history, fables, current events, and dreams inspire my figures. These esoteric raw materials, like the wire, polyester batting, panty hose, fabric, glue, found objects, and paint, of which the objects are built, gets cut, bound, bent, stitched, glued, taken apart, rearranged, and painted until the dolls tell me they are done. And sometimes, when finished, they tell me their title.

, Annie Wahl ,

My dolls celebrate the ordinary everyday life with characters that most people can relate to. They resemble your own relatives sometimes or maybe the little elderly cuties that you notice in church or in the park. I never make a doll that I wouldn't want to sit down with and have an interesting conversation over a cup of coffee and a good dessert!

The first doll I remember making was out of a cardboard roll, T.P. tissue, and tape. My mother taught me as a young child how to make yarn, cornhusk, and apple head dolls. This love and appeal for doll making never stopped over the years.

I started making character dolls fourteen years ago while researching the "Old World Santas and Gift Givers." The new polymer clay came into my life at the same time and my dolls began from there. Some of my character dolls have gone commercial with Richard Simmons' dream of creating "The Collection of the Masters" doll series. The main character is Nanna with her photo album of all her family that she talks about. Each family member appears in the collection.

I have been so strongly influenced and blessed by my own loving elderly relatives that I believe this love is reflected in my dolls. I am an NIADA member.

, Charlene Westling ,

My adventure into the world of doll making began after my three children were grown and beginning families of their own; families that have blessed my husband and me with three exceptional grandchildren. We are all native Kansans and reside in Topeka, the capitol city.

An educational background in music and art from Pittsburg State College in Kansas and the University of Louisville in Kentucky influenced my approach to doll design. Initially, my medium was porcelain; however, cloth—the warmth and flexibility of it—held an appeal for me. After much experimentation, a style developed that allows me to incorporate several important interests—a love for children, an interest in oil painting and the sewing skills I learned with my mother. I am currently working with fabric over composition. The textured surface I treat like canvas and paint in the manner of an oil portrait, developing intensity of expression with each application of paint.

The wonder and innocence of children make them my favorite subjects. My goal for each doll is to record some of a child's spontaneity—their moments of vulnerability. It is my desire to imply by the image I paint and the posturing of the body, that he or she is in the midst of an action of thought or movement, and has briefly hesitated in that action.

The dolls I create have to please me first of all. A bit of myself is transferred to each piece I do. They become distinct personalities as they emerge and will indicate to me what name they wish, their time period and the most appropriate style of clothing for them.

As I pursue this art I find myself agreeing with Marcel Proust, who wrote: "Happiness is to be found only in doing what one loves following the soul's profoundest bent." I have been a member of the National Institute of American Doll Artists since 1991.

, Nancy Wiley ,

As the creator of the award-winning "Panniere" series of dolls, I always thought of the doll as an art form. The daughter of a foreign service government employee, I grew up in Europe and moved with the family from place to place every few years, absorbing different cultures. Beginning with flea market doll collecting forays with my mother, I was always able to see the subtle differences between cultures as reflected in dolls.

After graduation from the Rhode Island School of Design, I came to New York to begin a career as an artist. I attribute my absorption into the world of dolls to doll artist Bill Wiley, my brother. I apprenticed with Bill, now deceased, to learn the intricacies of my art form. I credit him with guiding me to look within myself for inspiration and to believe in the doll form as a valid fine art medium of artistic expression.

My one-of-a-kind creations are shown continually at the CFM Gallery in SoHo, New York. I have shown at the Edith Lambert Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Stricoff Fine Art in New York, as well as other art galleries around the country. My work was part of the "Fascinating Figures: The Art of the Contemporary Doll" in 1996 at the Museum of American Folk Art. The "Panniere" series won the originality award at the Fourth World Doll Congress in Paris.

My work continues to make news, collected by public personalities such as the writer Anne Rice, actors Ray Liotta, Andy Garcia and Demi Moore. One of Wiley's "Panniere" art dolls was the inspiration for the June/July 1996 issue of GEORGE magazine.