



Sandy Pine

Sandy's Seventh Heaven

BY BELINDA HOGAN

Adelaide artist Sandy Pine started to make dolls to fill in time. Now almost a decade later, her clay and cloth dolls not only take us on a ride to a mystical world of fairies and princesses ... they have also transformed her life.

Sandy and Marionetta



The art of doll making became an obsession for Sandy after she retired from a long career in the beauty industry. Burnt out, Sandy knew she no longer wanted to continue in this line of work; but was lost on what direction to take. This changed in 2000, when she picked up a copy of Australian Dolls Bears and Collectables magazine – looking for a craft project to do. “When I saw the cloth dolls in the magazine, with their beautiful painted faces and hands, I was amazed,” she says. “Here was this beautiful doll, with a pattern I could attempt to make myself! I just had to try it.”

With no formal craft training, Sandy says it took a month to build up the courage to attempt her first piece. Her daring ambition to try something different plunged Sandy into the world of cloth doll making. “When I first started making dolls I wanted to

know everything, but I had no idea what some of the materials were and I struggled to make this doll,” she recalls. “I thought she was excellent! Of course I look at her now and cringe, but she reminds me how far I have come.”

After a couple of years, Sandy’s hobby started to become serious. “When I found out there were competitions at doll shows I decided this was a good way to get feedback on the quality of work I was doing,” she says. “In 2002, I won Best Novice Cloth Doll at the historic Hahndorf Doll Extravaganza in Adelaide. I could not believe it.”

Sandy started to sell her works at local craft shows thus turning her hobby into an artistic career. “I started making dolls to keep me busy and along the way I learnt new ways of experimenting with other mediums, so in the end there is an artistic piece, which is no longer a doll,” she says. “Although I have been inspired by doll makers around the world, I have developed my own style. In simple terms I am a mixed media artist who focuses on figurative art.”

As a person who loves a challenge, Sandy creates dolls that celebrate beauty. Taking inspiration from fantasy storybook characters and the Victorian and Edwardian eras, her pieces have become representative of the magical world of fairies and royalty. As a child she would spend hours drawing princesses in elegant robes, and she remembers being mesmerised by a photograph of Queen Elizabeth in a yellow gown on her classroom wall. “The type of doll I prefer to make is really a representation of the human form,” Sandy says. “I just do not enjoy making something like an alien or an ogre. Having said that, I do like elongated features – like unusually long arms or legs or even facial features – but they still have to have a human reality.”

Impossible Princess



Miss Polly





Today, Sandy prefers to draw on her imagination to create her clay over cloth dolls rather than sketch her ideas. "I tend to have an idea in my head of the character like a little girl, fairy in the garden or little princess," she says. "I may have an idea of how I want a certain piece of fabric to look, which is amazing considering I have fabrics stashed in about six different places in my studio."

It often takes Sandy weeks to actually progress with a doll because she works on three or four projects at one time. This instinctive creative process is ideal for her because it gives Sandy time to finish each piece with fresh eyes. "What I love about making dolls, is that moment when the doll tells you who she is," she says. "When I have a new character developed, I am so excited, I keep going in to the studio to just look at her."

When creating, Sandy believes in using readily accessible materials. For most dolls, she uses cloth such as calico or cotton for the original figure and then changes it with air-drying clay. "I really enjoy the tweaking you can do with air-dry clays because you can sand, carve, remodel and add to a piece," she says. "You can use the material to enhance a cloth doll, cover seams, and add features with acrylic paint."



Maid Marion.



Petal the Fairy.

Sandy sometimes attaches wire armatures to her sculptures and they always have long hair, generally made from mohair. "When I was little, the only doll I had did not have hair; she just had a plastic head with the look of hair," she says. "That was the time Barbie was becoming popular and she had beautiful hair, so now I have this thing about dolls and hair."

Getting the right balance in a piece is also of utmost importance to Sandy. "In my view, balance is really to do with the overall visual aspect of recognising the features that are pleasing to the eye," she says. "Someone once said that a well made doll will be able to stand if the body balance is right; and if the hands and feet are in proportion, the body can

be unusual. So to me, the doll must have realism, with some whimsy." Sourcing her materials has never been a hard task for Sandy, who also makes her own doll shoes out of leather. "When you make dolls, you find people start to source materials for you. A number of bags my sister has given me with little bits of stuff you would not think could be used,



Little Lottie

have found a home,” she says. “You also look at common items in a new light; discarded watchbands become belts, silk flower petals become skirts, and buttons become hats.”

As a prolific doll maker over the years, Sandy has used a diversity of patterns. However, these started to dissatisfy her. “The legs were the wrong shape or the head was too small as I was always trying to create a more balanced look,” she says. “A friend, who was successfully designing and selling patterns, encouraged me to design my own.”

Enjoying working on the computer made pattern making relatively easy and Sandy found after contacting a few distributors she had very positive responses. “I wanted to have a different approach so I designed pattern dolls with a mask face and the popularity was instant,” she says. “My intention was to offer a prepared mask for those doll makers who

wanted to make a doll, without having to make their own mask.” The tactic has worked extremely well for Sandy who now sells her patterns all over the world. “This business has been a pleasant surprise outcome from making dolls,” she says.

The world of dolls has certainly changed Sandy’s life and she says the greatest thing is that they just make you smile. “The day I started making dolls I had a whole new purpose. I made new friendships, found a whole world of wonderfully talented people and a completely new way of running a business,” she says.

“I once asked for advice from a well-known Australian doll maker who said ‘just make lots of dolls and the rest will fall into place’. You know what ... she was right!”

See some of Sandy’s work:

<http://sandypine.blogspot.com>

<http://picturetrail.com/spdolls> 