

Notes from *Wild Art Dolls*, a workshop
by Aisling D'Art, © 2002 all rights reserved

Basic doll guidelines, in general:

Rule # 1: It's a doll if you say it's a doll. No other rules apply.

Never do more work than you have to; if the doll won't be washed later, don't bother pre-shrinking the fabric. Don't cut plywood if foam board works just as well.

Never use cheap materials, unless you're going for the polyester look. Of course, a painted-velvet Elvis is possibly the ultimate doll.

Never make things you don't have to. If she needs eyelashes, consider using actual fake eyelashes from WalMart. Hands? Well, will stuffed gloves work?

On the other hand, define what you *do* want to make that is unique and part of your artistic vision. If you want to make eyelashes out of pine needles, for heaven's sake, go for it! If you want hands that are each a tuna can with multiple antique thread spools jointed as fingers, go for that as well!

What makes a doll?

A doll is made up of as many (or as few) body parts as are necessary to make the statement. A headless doll is okay. A doll that is only a face is okay. Just hands and feet on a Styrofoam ball? Sure, why not!

If your doll is missing body parts, is that a comment on what's missing? Is a doll without feet showing us how she cannot move outside of where she is, right now? Or is it simply expressive minimalism? We know it's a doll, whether or not it has feet. Or arms. Or any other body part, as long as the essence is conveyed by what *is* there.

Avoid cute. Quoting Anjelica Huston in the Oct 1995 issue of *W* magazine: "One mustn't strive for cuteness anymore – one must strive for *magnificence!*"

Fabric dolls

For materials, do *not* be locked into tradition, or the most insidious traditional thinking. Skin doesn't have to be peach, yellow, brown, pink, or white. Green is fine. Purple is fine. Paisley can be fabulous. Gold or copper metallic? Sure, why not!

Remember: Walt Disney was considered a radical when Mickey Mouse was produced with three fingers & a thumb, rather than four.

Buy the best stuffing/batting you can afford. Cheap stuffing gets lumpy with time. It may look "okay" today; by this time next year, she may look like a parody of cellulite!

Stuff tightly! Stuff with very small pieces of polyester batting. Use a tool. Chopsticks are the preferred tool of many people. Others use a special dollmaking tool such as the “StuffIt” or other pointy, clever design.

Fabric cut on the bias can bubble if you didn’t intend extra stretch across it. Cut with the grain, not across it.

Remember that you can shop for “fabric” outside the fabric store. Sometimes you can buy fabulous velvets & metallics in piece-sizes you need, by shopping the sale rack at TJ Maxx, etc. A XXL plush velvet skirt with a tear in it for \$5 may contain 5x that much in usable fabric.

The thrift shop may also be a fabulous resource for cheap fabrics; one year we decorated our entire Christmas/Yule tree with miniature teddy bears, made from tan wool cut from second-hand jackets & blazers. The price was 1/10 what it’d have been, if I’d bought that same wool at the fabric store.

Remember, cheap purses can be cut up for fake furs, the hardware (for an artpurse) and other scavenging.

(And, remember that a purse can *be* a doll. If she opens somewhere, and you can use it conveniently, why not fill her with your wallet, keys, etc?)

Also, shop at the home improvement/DIY shop. Remember screening... nylon, copper, etc. for bodies and body parts. Tape for seams instead of sewing. Grommets and wire. Screw eyes, to attach body parts and accessories.

And in the grocery store, you can find cheapo packages of cheesecloth that takes dyes and can be gel’d into shapes nicely. While you’re there, buy zipper-top baggies for storing your supplies. There is no other way to store loose, wild doll hair, except to bag it somehow.

Assemblage dolls

Think outside tradition. I made a cow from pink hair curlers (body) held together by a knotted silk stocking (forming head & tail, as well), with a flash cube (stripped down, for udders), and clothespins (for legs).

I have a *Ganesh* doll with an elephant head (of course), butterfly wings, a human body, and horses’ legs. The spirit of the god is in the flippant attitude of the assemblage!

As with any other doll, do not limit yourself to a certain number of eyes, limbs, or other body parts.

Think outside the arts & crafts shop. Look for things in nature. Parts by the side of the road. Check the ground, in back of the grocery & other stores... sometimes they drop amazing bits of metal, wood, and packaging.

Shop at hardware & home improvements stores. And again, look at the ground around the store for useful trash/discards.

Flea markets can be fabulous resources. Walk around and see what's there. Have a few books in your car, showing assemblage dolls & sculptures, and review them with reference to things you've seen at the flea market. Then go back and shop.

Also, stay past when the flea market closes. Again, you may find wonderful trinkets and bits of "trash" on the ground that are exactly what you want for a figure or an assemblage.

Check the bottom of your purse or bookbag for bits of funky stuff. And the "junk drawer" in your home... if you don't know where that nut or bolt belongs yet, maybe it's there to attach a significant something-or-other to your next project?

Glue: Household Goop is one of the best. Hot glue has its uses, but the "hot" version usually provides better adhesion. Golden Gel Medium is yet another adhesive, useful for lighter items and paper; I like the soft/gel variety. (I have not had the same success with other brands; let me know if you have.)

Paper dolls

A scanner and a good graphics program can pay for themselves in a very short amount of time. With a scanner, you can copy images from library books. I particularly like Dover books and old books, past their copyrights, for images.

When you scan and then adjust size, consider using standard measurements. Make all heads, say, two inches wide. Or four inches... or whatever size you like to work with most often. That way, you have a wealth of images that are interchangeable when you are ready to assemble your dolls.

Print out at least one (possibly low-grade) copy and keep it in a file. That way, you can sit in a peaceful/inspiring setting and sort through your images to design your figure. The computer monitor is not always in a position or setting for right-brained creativity. (But, positioning the monitor on the *left* corner of your desk can help.)

Lay the images out on yellow paper. The color yellow tends to stimulate right-brained thinking. If you're jotting notes for a creative project, use a yellow legal pad if you can.

Paper dolls tend to be more linear in design as well. In other words, you can get away with too many limbs, but if there are not enough... it can look as if the project is

incomplete. Make certain that your vision/statement is clear if the paper doll is non-traditional.

Consider color, if any. And remember that you can add color at any point, and with several media: Colored pencil, oil pastels, watercolors, acrylics, transparent colored tissue papers, or color the images before you print them, etc.

Jointed paper dolls? Joints can be made of several things. Brads for papers. Mini-grommets. Sewn with a double strand of thread, knotted, or knotted over small buttons. (For small dolls, use buttons intended for doll clothing.)

For adhesives, do *not* use rubber cement that may yellow or leave grease marks with age. Instead, I like Golden Gel Medium (soft/gloss), and many other archival paper adhesives.

Journaldolls

There are two very different ways to approach this concept. One is to make a doll that represents a time in your life. You can color her, paint her, add collage and/or assemblage elements, and so on. You can dress her in fabric from what you were wearing. Or take a strip of the fabric from the hem (or seam allowance) of a garment you're still wearing, and use it as an embellishment.

You can assemble her in your graphics program first, then iron the image onto fabric. I like the "*invent it!*" line of iron-on transfers by International Paper. They even make one you can iron onto dark fabric, and the image is still visible.

Or, you can design a doll that carries or encloses *an actual journal*. That is, she has a journal as part of her stomach, or her head. Or, she can have it in her hand, or slung over her wrist like a purse. You can give her a bookbag, with the journal in it. *Lots* of possibilities!

But of course, journaldolls will be another class in itself. This is just to get you started with ideas!

For more ideas on wild art dolls, visit <http://www.aisling.net>

Or, you can use the redirects of journaldolls.com or wildartdolls.com

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