

The CLOTH DOLL

VOL. 3, NO. 3

The Finest Quality Cloth Doll Magazine

X



Appropriate vs Excessive

by Colette Wolff

From the photographs I received, I could tell that the dollmaker had chosen a designer pattern that stuffed into a shapely well-rounded figure. Seams and darts created chin, cheeks and nose, all of which the dollmaker accentuated further with needle-modelling to indent the corners of mouth and eyes, to outline nostrils, and to make a crease between lower lip and chin. The doll's features were realistically painted; blushes of color were added to create the illusion of modelling in areas where other techniques could not actually model the form. The doll was finished with eyelashes glued to eyelids, a flowing wig of synthetic hair set in waves and curls, and ruffle-and-lace-trimmed clothing.

With all the best intentions, the dollmaker had gone too far. She employed every technique and material at her command to make her doll look as much like an idealized, real-life little girl as possible. But the means and methods she used to achieve her effects smothered the doll itself.

Her doll was overstated and overwrought. It was fascinating, but hardly endearing. In her pursuit of realism, the dollmaker had lost sight of the goal, and the spirit was lost.

A doll, dear reader, is a fantasy. The cloth doll in particular is make believe, let's pretend and play. It doesn't matter whether the doll is for a 65 year old collector or a 5 year old child, a cloth doll should be a source of comfort and a motivator of dreams. It should enchant, and it should have soul.

Expectations of what the craft of cloth dollmaking is capable of achieving have multiplied with the increase in materials and techniques at the cloth dollmaker's disposal. In the last 50 years, cloth dollmaking has come a long way. Designers who understand 3-dimensional fabric construction have developed patterns that stitch and stuff into appealing naturalistic figures. With the ad-

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a source of comfort
and a motivator of dreams'***

vent of polyester stuffing and stretch knits, needlemodelling techniques allowed dollmakers to produce figures with naturalistic detailing. The contemporary cloth doll is a sophisticated creation compared to its humble predecessors.

Although pattern and needlemodelling techniques have expanded the sculptural possibilities of the cloth doll, the cloth doll is not a sculpture in the sense that the porcelain doll is a sculpture. The materials and techniques of porcelain dollmaking lend themselves to the pursuit and accomplishments of very realistic effects. Body contours and facial features of a porcelain doll can duplicate every bone, muscle and tissue formation of a real-life counterpart. Such realism is appropriate to the medium, just as painted features, artificial eyelashes and acrylic or human hair wigs are appropriate to complete the realistic portrait stated by the porcelain sculpture.

***'The cloth doll artist chooses
materials and techniques that
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a particular doll.'***

There's harmony to porcelain, paint and acrylic or human hair wigs just as there's harmony to cloth, embroidery and wigs of yarn. Artists who use cloth to cut and stuff into a doll know that there is a point where the materials and techniques of their craft can't be pushed any further without calling too much attention to themselves. The cloth doll artist chooses materials and techniques

that are harmonious and appropriate to the concept of a particular doll.

A cloth doll artist loves the craft as much for what it can't do as what it can do, and happily turns the limitations of the medium into assets. Cloth doll artists create dolls with the power of suggestion. Their dolls stimulate imagination, inviting the person looking at the doll to identify with it, to finish it with a personality that the dollmaker began.

'A cloth doll artist happily turns the limitations of the medium into assets.'

On the bulletin board in my studio there's a picture of a trio of antique folk dolls that I cut out from a magazine. They are simple, flat constructions of muslin with arms that stick straight out from their bodies, necks that are too thick and heads of uneven shape, hands identified by stumpy indications for thumbs, and legs that turn up into pointed feet. Facial features are indicated with round buttons for eyes, straight lines for mouths and curving lines for eyebrows. Little knots of yarn spaced around

the head suffice for hair; the black doll has pigtails that stick straight out from the head.

The dolls are homely, clumsy and captivating. Unlike the dollmaker who sent me the photographs of her doll, that dollmaker of long ago was true to the materials she had to work with, true to the level of skill she possessed, and true to the nature and purpose of the doll-persons she created.

Cloth dollmaking today has come too far to be satisfied with such naivete, except in appreciation of the past and of dolls made by children. At the other extreme it's a mistake to burden the cloth doll with expectations it was never meant to fulfil. Just how "realistic" is a cloth doll meant to be?

When there's so much to work with, it's not easy to know when to stop and what to leave out, but that's the challenge.

Editor's Note: Colette Wolff, in the pattern business for over 10 years under her 'Platypus' label, has been setting high standards for quality and innovation in the field. Her catalog of original doll and craft patterns and kits is available for \$1.00 from: Platypus (CD), Box 396, Planetarium Station, New York, NY 10024.



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The CLOTH DOLL

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THE FINE ART OF STUFFING

by Colette Wolff



Every time I teach a dollmaking class to beginners, their reaction to "Introduction to Stuffing" is the same. Initially, they're surprised when I explain that there's more to stuffing than pushing wads of it through a hole into a cavity. They have trouble believing that stuffing a shapely figure doesn't happen automatically. Then they're amazed to discover that stuffing is a vigorous, not a genteel, activity. They're astonished at the quantity of stuffing that disappears and continues to disappear inside the fabric container. They're shocked at the amount of time and care required to stuff properly. And when they're finished stuffing their first doll, they express considerable respect for the cloth dollmaker's craft!

In dollmaking, stuffing is "where it's at," to borrow a contemporary phrase. Certainly accurate cutting and precise seaming are important, but the best preparation is worthless unless stuffing can make that flat container of fabric approximately 3-dimensional. A beautifully stuffed doll has pleasing contours and a smooth surface — *and it looks and feels substantial as well.* Even a softly stuffed doll needs interior stability or else it will change shape every time it's handled.

Before the miracle of polyester, the soft stuffed doll that's cuddly, squeezable and washable wasn't possible. Cotton and kapok, common stuffings before polyester, lumped, matted, and quickly lost resilience. The polyester stuffing favored by today's experienced cloth dollmakers is non-allergenic, washable, extra resilient, and

never bunches or shifts. It can be packed forcefully to make a doll that's solid and firm, or it can be compressed with limited thrust to make a doll that's soft but sturdy.

To propel stuffing into the fabric container, dollmakers have favorite tools, like cooks have favorite knives. Fingers are the dollmaker's most obvious stuffing tool, but fingers can't reach or fit into all extremities so stuffing tools are necessary. Knitting needles, crochet hooks, dowels of various diameters, pencils (the eraser end is the stuffing tip), wooden spoons (the bowl of the spoon becomes the handle), chopsticks, screwdrivers with corners rounded, skewers, straightened hairpins or paper clips, tapestry needles - all have their uses for one stuffing purpose or another. Choose a tool that's strong enough for the job, that fits into the cavity and is comfortable to hold. Vary the tool you use as the size of the cavity and the nature of the stuffing challenge changes.

RELATE THE SIZE OF THE PIECES OF STUFFING YOU INSERT TO THE SIZE OF THE AREA YOU'RE FILLING.

For example: stuff slender fingers with the tiniest wisps of stuffing pushed on the end of a long, thin tool into each fingertip. Add more wisps until the fingers are stuffed to the palm. Pad the palm with slightly larger bits of stuffing. As palm becomes wrist and then arm, the size of the pieces of stuffing inserted can increase as the diameter of the inside space increases. Large pieces of stuffing should be reserved for stuff-

ing large body cavities such as torso and head.

YOU SHOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO SEE OR FEEL WHERE ONE PIECE OF STUFFING ENDS AND THE NEXT ONE BEGINS. Each succeeding piece of stuffing should be worked, poked, pressed, even forced into position against previous stuffing to mingle and blend the newest stuffing with the stuffing already in place. The casing, or fabric skin of the doll, should look and feel smooth and unbroken, as if the stuffing were poured inside rather than inserted piece by piece. No lumps or bumps unless such configurations are designed into the figure. No wrinkles unless they're part of the characterization of the doll. Build stuffing slowly and carefully, bit by piece, into the casing until its 3-dimensional potential is fully realized.

STUFF THE SHAPE YOU CUT AND STITCHED INTO THE CASING. Understand the possibilities and the limitations of the pattern you're using. Imagine, or draw if that helps, what a cross-section of the doll's body should look like at any given point and stuff that shape. If your pattern is composed of many pieces, or if it is extensively darted, cross-sections of head and torso can be stuffed realistically round or oval. But if the pattern you are using has one pattern piece for each section and no darts, your pattern will produce a pillow doll, or a "flattie" in the terminology of doll-makers. Any attempt to produce a head, for example, that's round when viewed from any angle, will only result in heavy wrinkling at the side seams and a head that's too small for the torso when viewed from the front.

STUFF THE CASING TO ITS LIMITS. Stuff each detail and part of the figure as full as possible; stuff until the threads of the seams are visible. If your pattern pieces have curvy outlines with lots of ins and outs, define every bulge with thoughtful stuffing placement. Know how firmly you need to stuff each part of the doll's figure to make it self-supportive, to assemble and hang proper-

ly, and to survive playful handling. If your pattern is designed to produce a realistically detailed figure, pack stuffing into the casing until the fabric is stretched tight and smooth over the stuffing. Stuff necks and legs, in particular, for strength and durability. Even simple one-pattern pillow dolls must be stuffed firmly enough to keep their shapes after touching and pushing around. (The exception: if your casing fabric is excessively stretchy, you must carefully control the amount of stuffing you insert or the doll you're making will become a gross distortion of itself.)

USING FINGERS AND EYES, EVALUATE WHAT YOUR STUFFING IS PRODUCING. Constantly feel, stroke, press and smooth with one hand to encourage the stuffing being inserted with the other hand into the desirable shape. From time to time hold your work at arm's length to consider the outlines of the form that's emerging. You can't see what you're doing while you're stuffing right next to your body. Always check your work from all sides to judge the symmetry, balance and proportions of the figure. Make corrections immediately. Compare the size and shape of one arm with the other, one leg to the other. Just because both are cut and stitched from the same pattern doesn't mean that they will spontaneously stuff into a matching pair. Complete the shaping of each area to your satisfaction before moving on to stuff the next section.

When you have finished stuffing and the opening is stitched closed, **MODEL THE STUFFED FIGURE WITH HAND AND FINGER PRESSURE.** Mould each part of the doll's figure in your hands almost as if it were made of clay. Smooth slight surface irregularities with finger pressure and rolling between your palms. Flatten hands and feet with hand pressure. Accentuate indentations at neck, waist, wrists and ankles by pinching and squeezing. Define eye hollows by pressing into the head with fingers. Even flat dolls can acquire subtle shaping with finger pressure in appro-

prate places.

TAKE YOUR TIME. Stuffing doesn't get faster with experience. If anything, it takes longer the more you appreciate what can be achieved with thoughtful, painstaking work.

And it is work. It's a rough and muscular activity. There are some small, simple dolls that can be stuffed with ladylike ease and delicacy, but stuffing a casing into a 3-dimensional representation of a human figure with all its hollows, bulges, indentations and other details is work. However, the superior result - the rewards of creation, pleasure and approval - are worth every ounce of the effort — and the stuffing.

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Documenting the Past

by Colette Wolff

The Raggedys

Yesterday I walked through F.A.O. Schwartz, New York City's famous toy store, and there was Raggedy Andy, tumbling downward on bicycles beside the escalator I was riding up. Raggedy Ann, his significant other, waited for him on the second floor. In three sizes and in quantity, she filled the cubicles in a wall of shelves. "Don't feel sad. Everything's going to be all right," she seemed to be saying, as she's been saying since 1914 or thereabouts when Johnny Gruelle painted those famous features on an old rag doll with a worn-off face, and made up stories about Raggedy Ann and her adventures in "the deep, deep woods" to lull his ailing daughter, Marcella, to sleep.

Because the original Raggedy Ann was a very private doll person with a mission, the exact date of her creation isn't recorded. However, we know that Marcella Gruelle was 10 in 1912 when vaccination with an unsterilized needle caused a heart infection that kept her an invalid until she died in 1916 at age 14. We also know that the original Raggedy Ann lived in the attic of the Gruelle house in Silvermine, Connecticut, a relic from the childhood of Marcella's paternal grandmother, before

the cast-off doll was reincarnated by Marcella's father to be a companion for his home-bound little girl.

Since accounts conflict, we don't know whether Johnny Gruelle or his mother thought of the name, Raggedy Ann, and we don't know who invented Raggedy Andy. We do know that two years after Marcella's death, Raggedy Ann, Raggedy Andy, and their cloth



A Raggedy is the ultimate best friend, never inviting comparisons of better, prettier, smarter, or more popular.

doll friends were introduced to the public in a book written and illustrated by Johnny Gruelle, who at that time worked as a cartoonist and illustrator for the Indianapolis Star. The little book was an immediate success. It was called *The Adventures of Raggedy Ann*, and included stories titled: "Raggedy Ann Learns a Lesson," "Raggedy Ann and the Kite," "Raggedy Ann Rescues Fido,"

"Raggedy Ann and the Painter," and "Raggedy Ann's Trip on the River."

In 1920, a Raggedy Ann doll was displayed with the book in the window of Marshall Fields, a Chicago department store. It was not the original loved by Marcella, but a doll specially made to look like the illustrations drawn by Gruelle. After it was purchased by an insistent customer, the Georgene Novelty Company manufactured the first Raggedy Anns and that was the beginning. Before he died in 1938, Gruelle wrote and illustrated eighteen Raggedy books and lived to see his Raggedys become a cloth doll phenomenon.

A Raggedy has a soft, floppy, simple and somewhat bulky figure; red-and-white striped legs above black self-shoes; a mop-like wig of thick, red yarn; and (the secret of its authenticity) a heart with the message, "I love you," imprinted or embroidered on the chest. The face is delineated with black eyes, a red nose and mouth, black smile lines and eyebrows, and squiggly black lines under the eyes. Raggedy Ann always wears knee-length white drawers with a white pinafore over a red calico dress. Raggedy Andy wears blue pants, a red and white checkered shirt and a cap. With the same distinctive Gruelle-designed face, the Raggedy doll-character has been relevant for seventy-one years.

A Raggedy is the ultimate best friend, never inviting comparisons of better, prettier, smarter, or more popular. A Raggedy is the ideal confidant, always understanding and sympathetic because the Raggedy has "been there." Dropped in ungainly poses, worn, dirty, abandoned, the spirit of a Raggedy shines through any condition because perfection was never a part of the concept.

Over the years, millions of Raggedy dolls in numerous sizes have been manufactured by dozens of companies in every quality from cheap to fine. A Raggedy is the ultimate best friend,

Raggedys photo by Cheryl Kingsly



never inviting comparisons of better, prettier, smarter, or more popular. When Raggedy fever was particularly strong in the 1970's, Raggedy image appeared on an amazing variety of products and the dolls were used to sell all sorts of merchandise, often pushing unlikely relationships. The Gruelle family still holds the rights to the dolls. The rights to the books and subsidiary uses were sold to Bobbs-Merrill by corporation Gruelle's widow, Myrtle set up after his death. Macmillan picked up the rights from Bobbs-Merrill in 1985, but let the books go out of print.

The heart of this enormous commercial bonanza is still the homely, huggable, indestructible Raggedy Ann doll that Johnny Gruelle created for Marcella and bequeathed to generations of children who see themselves reflected in that face.

A Raggedy doesn't have to be bought in a store; McCall's has held the franchise for Raggedy Ann and Andy patterns since 1940. In their catalog, #244 makes dolls 10", 15", 20", and 25" tall. #3998 makes dolls 36" tall. Both patterns include face and heart transfers. The consoling expression, "Don't feel sad—everything's going to be all right," has never lost its appeal.

Documenting the Past

by Colette Wolff

Lenci

Mention felt-bodied dolls to a collector and the first name you'll hear is "Lenci." When Elena Konig di Scavini needed a trademark name for the dolls she designed, she chose her childhood pet name, Lenci, and founded a remarkable dollmaking enterprise.

Elena Konig was born in Turin, Italy in 1886. At the age of 20, she went to Dusseldorf, Germany where she studied art for several years. She married Enrico Scavini on February 1, 1915. In 1918, when Enrico was away in the army during World War I, Elena and her brother, Bubine Konig, made the first Lenci dolls in Elena's Turin apartment. Bubine operated the steam molding machine and Elena did all the rest of the work, including the designing. In 1919, although the dolls were still being made in the apartment, they made their dollmaking business official. When Enrico returned from the war, he found himself a partner in a dollmaking company with demand already outpacing production.

In 1922, Enrico registered the Lenci trademark in Italy and Great Britain and the firm moved to larger quarters. In 1924, the trademark was registered in the United States. In 1925, the business moved again to a site where as many as 400 workers, including other designers, were eventually employed.

The felt bodied and dressed dolls that Elena designed were enthusiastically received from the beginning. Their naturalistically modelled and painted faces captured expressions 'on the fly,' as we would say today. Her doll persons look as if they were caught in the act of re-



Illustration ©

Gabriele's Doll Studios

sponding unselfconsciously to someone or something provocative. They interact with the viewer, an irresistible attraction then as now. Lenci dolls were also artistically conceived down to the smallest detail of figure and dress. They were made from quality materials with superior workmanship, and they required extensive handwork to produce.

They began with felt, backed with buckram and other stiffening agents, which was pressed into molds and steamed under pressure to retain the detailed modelling of head and torso. The heads, which were fitted into a neck socket, could swivel. Arms and legs of stuffed felt were movably jointed to the body at shoulders and hip. Although some early Lencis had wigs of human hair, most had mohair wigs and a few had wigs of felt cut into narrow strips. The dolls ranged in size from 4" miniatures to 48" display dolls, but most

were in the 9", 13", and 18" area.

The characteristic, handpainted features of a Lenci doll include wide eyes that glance to the side and a small, rosy mouth with two highlights on a lighter-colored lower lip. But it is the astonishing variety of expression those features convey, complemented by figure, pose, and clothing, that makes Lenci dolls so unique. They could be appealingly wistful, coy, grumpy, startled, doubtful, wondering, dreamy, or even angry.

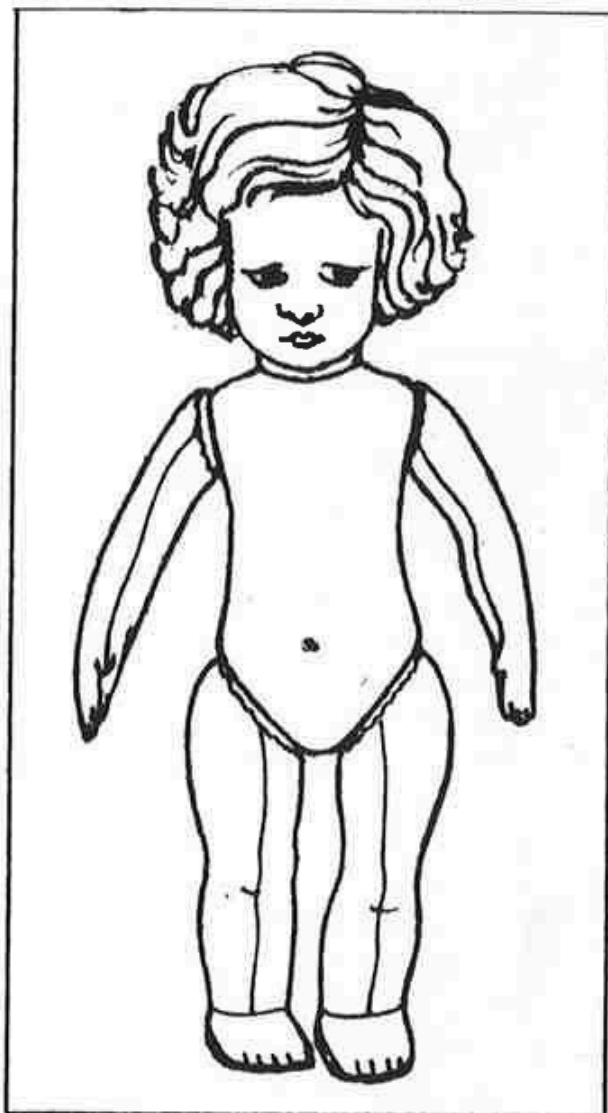
Clothing, made from colored felt, often combined with organdy, was elaborate and fanciful. The dolls were dressed in the style of the day or in regional, historical, sporty, or theatrical costume, and accessorized accordingly. Original with Lenci, felt was snipped into blocks, circles, strips, and shapes, and then pieced together or appliqued to the felt garment as trim or overall design.

A Lenci doll was expensive to make and expensive to buy, but that didn't discourage customers. Adults bought them for themselves, as well as for children. Their popularity attracted competitors who produced cheaper imitations, some quite excellent. In the 1930's, the Lenci factory began cost cutting to keep up with the pressure.

In December of 1936, Elena Konig di Scavini sold the company and the rights to the Lenci trademark to Pilade Garella. Garella allowed the Scavini family to continue living on premises owned by the factory and retained Elena as Art Director, a position she held until 1941. In 1938, Enrico Scavini died. The factory, heavily damaged by bombings during World War II, was reopened by Garella after the war but the dolls it produced were never the same.

Elena survived the war to continue creating dolls with her daughter, Anili, marketing them as Anili dolls. Disillusioned with the large-scale way of producing dolls, Elena persuaded Anili to forego quantity for quality, to limit the

A Lenci doll with an all-felt body. Head and torso are hollow, molded under pressure into rigid shape. Legs and arms are stuffed, with a hand-stitched gusset where they are dis-jointed to the torso. Fingers are separated except for the 3rd and 4th, which are jointed.



size of the new dollmaking business so that they could exercise complete control. Under the hands-on supervision of Anili, the business operates that way today, producing a limited number of prized dolls that honor the Lenci tradition they continue. Elena was actively involved in the making of Anili dolls until a few years before her death in 1974.

Readers: If you have any information about dollmakers Joan Russell or Ethel Rigby--dates, relatives, addresses, other data--please write to Colette Wolff, Box 396, Planetarium Station, New York, NY 10024.

Book Reviews—

Continued from page 18

cludes doll-house scale. There is also a table for calculating the photocopy reductions. Using this, you can determine the correct size for printing your own fabric in the same scale as your doll.

The section on laying out a grid to make a repeat design is very important. Antoinette emphasizes that using a grid does not hamper the designer's creativity, but acts as a safety net to assure the best performance possible. Many variations in design are illustrated, as well as step-by-step instructions for laying out the grid on your fabric.

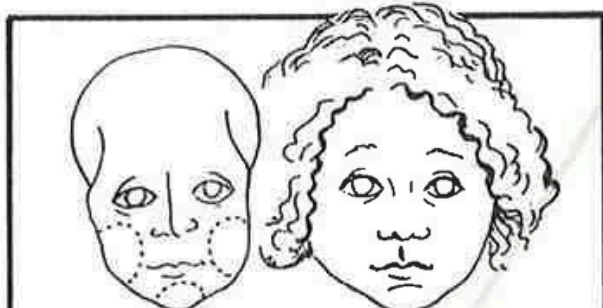
You will find the workbook approach of this manual very useful. There are work pages for you to use to keep track of your supply sources; tables for making exact reductions; and work pages with spaces for your test samples of dyed fab-

rics, test samples from stencil making, stamp making, fabric transfers and marbling.

Attractively bound in a three-ring binder, clearly written and illustrated with full-color swatches, Antonette Cely's *Creating Your Own Fabric* will enhance even the most complete craftbook library.

—Gini Warren and Marlene Lacunza,

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Documenting the Past

by Colette Wolff

The Mabrys

I remember the ads for NETTI® doll patterns that appeared regularly in McCall's Needlework and Crafts magazine in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Even though the pictures were tiny, the dolls stood out because they were so neat and harmoniously costumed. I recall wondering who was behind the mysterious "T.E.M. of California," the name of the business offering the patterns.

Now I know. T.E.M. is Tressa E. Mabry, the designer of the Netti dolls. From 1975 to 1986, Tressa and George Mabry operated T.E.M. of California, selling by mail the patterns they published for the dolls that Tressa designed.

Tressa and George met in 1947 when both were engineering students at the University of Illinois. They married and

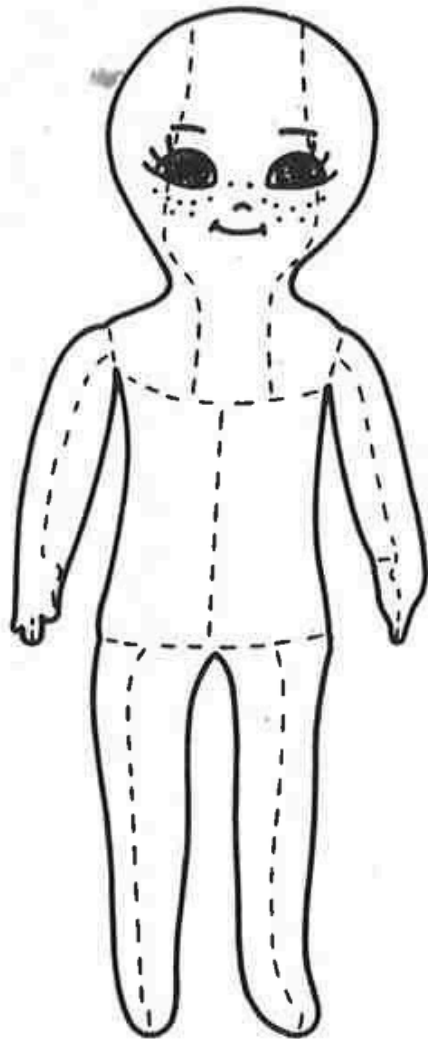
moved to Southern California where George worked in the aerospace industry. Unable to work as an engineer because, at that time, employers discriminated against women engineers, Tressa stayed home to raise the Mabry's three children.

In the early 1970's, the aerospace industry experienced a slowdown with cutbacks and layoffs. Although George was still working, Tressa, with children grown and future uncertain, wanted a moneymaking activity for herself. A skilled needleworker, she turned to her lifelong interests in fashion, apparel design, and dolls. In 1973, she placed a classified ad in Doll Castle News for an original cloth doll. The doll sold quite well but she realized that she couldn't make enough money selling handmade dolls to compensate for the time involved.

Although Tressa didn't tell George about the doll project until orders began arriving, he was immediately interested. It was George who saw the profit potential in selling patterns for dolls rather than the dolls themselves. He suggested mailorder and a schedule of one new pattern every three months as a workable business concept. So, in 1975, T.E.M. of California offered its first doll pattern with another classified ad in Doll Castle News. That pattern for a simple, flat doll with embroidered features, yarn hair, and eight different outfits was followed by a second pattern with eight Bicenten



NETTIE® "Little Charmers" 8" Pattern



A Tressa E. Mabry sketch of a NETTIE® toddler doll showing seams from pattern pieces assembled to shape the figure.

nially-inspired costumes for the same doll. T.E.M.'s first display ad in the Spring 1976 issue of McCall's Needlework and Crafts, which presented the "Netti Bicentennial Pattern," inaugurated ten years of constant advertising involving, to quote Tressa, "just about every needlework and handcraft magazine that existed."

The business was a partnership from the beginning. While Tressa developed the prototype dolls and their costumes into printable patterns with instructions, George, with his computer expertise, organized the marketing aspects of the enterprise. He processed orders, maintained mailing list and financial records, dealt with the post office and the printer, wrote ads, organized promotional activities, photographed the dolls, and inked

Tressa's pencil-drawn patterns. When T.E.M. of California began, George was still working full-time. By 1980, when he retired to do occasional consulting, the business which had taken over their four-bedroom house, had grown into a full-time occupation for both Mabry's.

From the beginning, the Mabry's were concerned with producing a quality product. Patterns were illustrated with photos, professionally typeset and offset printed. Before they went to the printer, the Mabry's discussed the wording of the instructions and Tressa verified the final version of the patterns and directions by making the doll and costumes again.

Tressa describes her designing process as "trial and error." She said, "The first patterns that I designed were made solely for the purpose of making clothes for my daughter's dolls. When I was designing a new pattern, I would keep making the pieces using paper to wels, or similar material, and sewing them together. I would try the paper garment on the doll. If it didn't fit quite right, I would make some adjustments and try another paper garment until I was satisfied." She also extensively researched the period styles which she interpreted into doll-sized outfits.

Named to honor Tressa's mother, Netti dolls were made from tightly-stuffed muslin or percale, seam-jointed at the shoulder and hip, and wigged with yarn. Although Tressa designed one 17" doll and a doll-house doll, the typical Netti was only 8" to 12" tall. The two-pattern-piece flat doll, that modeled the original costume collections, was replaced with a nine-pattern-piece contoured doll in 1976. In 1981, the design changed again to involve a centered head-gusset that shaped the facial area with jaw and cheeks. Appropriately modified, the basic doll pattern became a baby, toddler, child, or adult with features dominated by large, often elaborately embroidered eyes, contrasting with the single, curving line that

always indicated the mouth.

Netti dolls communicate with a candid, straight-forward expression. Never self-consciously cute or coy, their meticulous costuming is similarly, but authentically, unostentatious. Tressa never allowed exaggerated silhouette, excessive trimming, or flashy accessories to overwhelm the doll itself. While remaining true to the essence of a costume period or style, she understood the value of mere suggestion—that less is more when dressing such small figures.

By 1983, T.E.M. of California had published one-hundred seventy-five of Tressa's designs, assembled into topical collections. Included in the "Netti Family of Fine Doll Patterns" were Bridal, Carriage, Trolley, Gay Nineties and Empire collections for an 11-1/2" Fashion doll; Little Charmers, Schoolgirl, Romper, Playmates, and Recitation collections for 9" childhood dolls; Pram patterns for a 9" baby doll; 12" Baby, Toddler, and Childhood dolls with one costume; Doll House dolls, and more.

According to an article about the Mabrys that appeared in the June 1983 issue of *Lady's Circle* magazine, their business had accumulated a mailing list of 30,000 names by that time. But during that year, George's part-time consulting turned into a full-time job. Tressa stopped creating new designs for publication, although the Mabrys continued to run display ads for the Netti patterns through 1986.

In 1986, George retired again. In 1989, the Mabrys moved to a new house built for them by their son in Hesperia, California, on the edge of the Mojave Desert. They still receive two or three inquiries every week, some from previous customers, others from old advertisements. Tressa says, "Whenever a major winter storm hits the mid-section of the nation, we can expect to receive any number of responses from some very old maga-

"Jenny" Toddler Doll 12" Nugget Pattern



zines." With T.E.M. of California as a business in their past, Tressa has turned to a different craft—miniature quilt-making, and George is happily engrossed with three new computers.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Susan Prokop of Bellevue, Washington, who sent a photocopy of an article about the Mabrys that appeared in *Lady's Circle* magazine, June 1983. Tressa E. Mabry answered questions and supplied up-to-date information.

Note: Although the Mabrys no longer reprint sold-out patterns, they do sell the patterns that remain in stock. Write to: T.E.M. of California, 18275 Hercules St., Hesperia, CA 92345-5558. Enclose a long SASE for a brochure of available Netti doll patterns.

Documenting the Past

by Colette Wolff

Dolls Help To Preserve Tibetan Culture— The Losel Dolls

Periodically, magazines for those of us who stitch present articles about workrooms—suggesting ways for organizing materials and using space efficiently, recommending specialized furnishings, and so on. Those same magazines carry advertisements for the latest tools and gadgets we can buy to help us work better, faster, and more accurately.

I remembered those articles during my visits to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City to watch four Tibetan monks make dolls. From October 4th through November 8th, 1991, the monks, who had travelled from the Drepung Loseling monastery of a "living in southern India, were participating in an exhibit" entitled "To Preserve Tibetan Culture: Monks Demonstrate a Modern Craft."

In the Hall of Birds of the World, the museum had built two platforms about 10 inches high, each measuring about 6 by 8 feet. The display by the monks case for the dolls was completed. Two monks occupied each platform, sitting cross-legged on cushions. Tucking a piece of cotton fabric around their legs, they worked on their laps. If they needed a solid, flat surface, they placed an ordinary board across their knees. Their working materials and implements, many self-designed, were neatly arranged within reach and stored in shopping bags and boxes. The only electricity they required powered the lighting that illuminated the window-less room. Everything was economical—their move-

ments, their selection and use of materials, their tools, their space—and they made magnificent dolls!



*"Woman from Tsang with Child:"
These dolls, created by Tibetan monks, are representative of the aristocracy of the Southwestern region of Tibet. The silk brocades are from Benares, India. The child is wearing a fur trimmed hat typical of central Tibet fashion.*

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Making costumed dolls is not a traditional Tibetan craft, but a recent occupation for artisan monks whose skills were traditionally applied to religious arts. Before the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the Drepung Loseling monastery near Lhasa housed some 7,500 monks. In 1959, after the occupation, some of the monks escaped to India, relocating to land in the south, where they spent the next twenty years building a new monastery and cultivating fields. To provide for a continuing migration of monks from Tibet, the monastery in exile (at present, a growing community of more than 500 monks) needed to generate funds. Having rebuilt their institutions, the monks also wanted to perpetuate the artistic skills and traditions that had been ignored by necessity during their early years in India when survival was their main concern.

In 1983, Kim Yeshe, an American living in India with her Tibetan husband, suggested creating a sort of guild that would commission a few monks, trained as tailors, sculptors, painters and embroiderers, to make objects celebrating Tibetan culture for sale in the outside world, and teach apprentices at the same time. This idea, and the monks' imagination, inspired the Losel Dolls.

The dollmaking process developed by the monks utilizes what works from materials they find. Figures start as sturdy wire, shaped with pliers into a simpli-



Tibetan Monk Adjusting Costume of a Losel Doll: Lhabab, a Tibetan monk from the Drepung Loseling Monastery, adjusts the costume on a monastic character doll.

fied skeleton. The skeleton is padded with cotton stuffing and wrapped with a special Tibetan paper made from the bark of a shrub that grows in the Himalayas. Heads are individually sculpted from a mixture of shredded Tibetan paper and local clay, which forms a substance that is easily molded and almost unbreakable when air-dried overnight. Since it also shrinks 20% when dry, the original modelling changes character unexpectedly, contributing to the uniqueness of the heads.

After painting, each head, matched in shape, size and image to a body, is settled over a projecting wire and the neck is merged into the torso with more paper. Hands are attached last. Since the clay substance used for heads isn't suitable for such delicate elements as fingers, pliable hands are made from synthetic resin poured into molds carved from wood.

Heads are painted in the stylized manner of Tibetan religious statues. At



A Tibetan General: The doll shown here is modeled after a Tibetan general from the 1930's. His uniform is a blend of British style with Tibetan elements. During the reign of the 13th Dalai Lama, the Tibetan government decided to modernize its army, using the British as models. The soldier, being of high rank, wears his hair in two topknots with a small gold charm box in between, and a sodjln, or long earring, hanging from his right ear.

the museum, Tenzin Tsonyen used Liquitex acrylics and fine brushes to outline facial features, finishing each head with a protective coat of Krylon spray varnish. After assembly, he painted the entire figure to match the skin color of the head. During one of my visits, another monk, Pema Ludrup, used a 12" metal saw to groove a doll's head from forehead to back-of-neck. He pushed and glued strands of hair into the groove for a wig. The monks prefer real hair, thick and black, which they buy in the Indian bazaars near their monastery.

The monks excel at costuming and accessorizing pairs and groupings of dolls. With their dolls, they are creating a unique record of Tibet's rich heritage of regional, monastic, and ceremonial dress; traditions that the Chinese are systematically eradicating in their homeland.

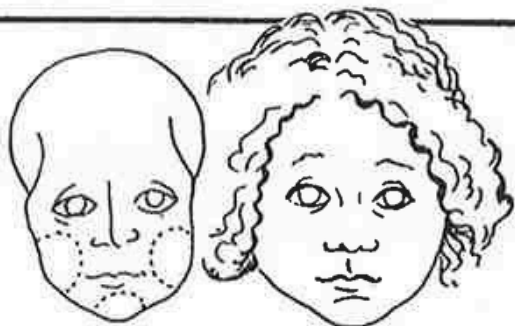
Each Losel doll is a team effort, the more complex dolls taking five to six weeks to complete. During my four visits, I watched Yeshe Gyaltzen separating the plies of a twisted cotton thread into strands to make a standing brush that crowned a hat from front to back-of-neck. He had just finished making ten pairs of tiny boots, all different, with colored insets and tiny embroidered motifs.

Yeshe Thogmey was sewing a lined, coat-like garment. Wearing a thin-looking leather thimble on his second finger, he pinned the pieces to be seamed to the cloth covering his knee, sewed toward himself with a backstitch that looked like machine-stitching, re-pinned, and continued sewing until he needed to secure the seam. He then cut the thread with heavy, brass-handled, forged shears about 16" long. His fabric, which, apparently, he never pressed, came from a collection of used bits and pieces jumbled into a shopping bag.

Pema Ludrup carved a long, tubular, flaring form from wood, cut a paper pattern that fit around the form, cut thin aluminum to the shape of the pattern, and, using a small hammer, proceeded to shape the aluminum around the wooden form. On my next visit, the aluminum form had become part of a long, decorative trumpet that collapsed like a telescope. This time he was tapping out aluminum ornaments using circular molds carved into a thick board placed across his knees.

Each Losel doll documents a facet of the dress-culture of Tibet. Groupings of dolls document festivals and specialized activities; merchants and buyers at the Lhasa market, ceremonial dancers in per-

formance, monks observing ritual functions, and aristocrats at a picnic were scenes on view in display cases at the museum. The monks from the Drepung Loseling Monastery in India are documenting Tibet's past with their dolls.



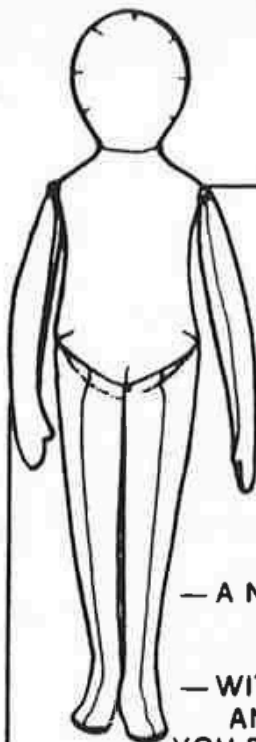
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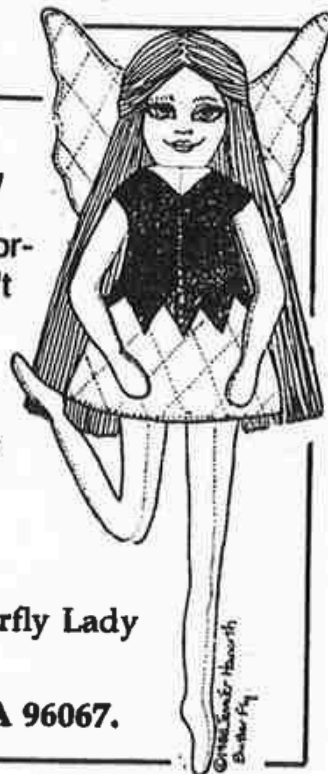
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Documenting the Past

by Colette Wolff

Edith Flack Ackley

"Anonymous," was a cloth dollmaker. Quiltmakers are fond of saying that anonymous was a quiltmaker, but the anonymous cloth dollmaker is almost a given.

A couple of years ago at the first Great American Quilt Festival here in New York, the Folk Art Museum mounted displays from their collection, one of which included a cloth doll attributed to "anonymous." Some who attended recognized the doll because of its distinctive style as the work of Edith Flack Ackley. Even though Ackley wrote a book about cloth dollmaking which takes her out of the anonymous category, she probably hadn't signed her doll and the museum curator didn't know enough about cloth dollmaking to make an identification. We can't blame the curator because cloth dollmaking is a sub-sub-sub-sub-category in the textile arts field, when recognized at all, and is so poorly documented that research is difficult.

I wanted to know more about Edith Flack Ackley. Because I knew her husband was a well-known New England lithographer, I was able to discover the following, not by researching Edith Flack Ackley, but through biographies about Stow Wengenroth, her husband.

Edith Flack Ackley was a dollmaker, doll designer and writer who was born in Greenport, Long Island, N.Y., in the early 1900's. She studied portrait painting after high school but following the death of her first husband, gave it up for marionette making which provided the subject for an early book, *Marionettes: Easy To Make! Fun To Use!*

In 1936, she met and married Stow Wengenroth, an artist-lithographer renowned for his beautiful prints of the New England coast. During their 34 years of marriage, they lived in New York City and then moved to Greenport, but always spent summers in Maine. By all accounts they were a devoted couple; she was the most influential force in his artistic career and he was equally supportive of her dollmaking vocation.

In the mid 1930's, Kennedy Galleries in New York showed Wengenroth's prints while the Macbeth Galleries, nearby on 57th Street, displayed Edith's dolls, and doll paintings by Teckla Ackley, her daughter. Edith and her daughter collaborated on two children's books; *Please*, and *Thank You*. Teckla also illustrated *Dolls To Make For Fun And Profit*, Edith's book about cloth dollmaking. In addition to being a doll designer, Edith was a published poet. During the last years of her life, severely crippled with arthritis, she seldom left her room but continued sewing dolls, maintained a voluminous correspondence and never lost her lively interest in the world outside. She died December 1, 1970.

During her lifetime, Edith Flack Ackley made hundreds of dolls, all "cloth stuffed with cotton, and faces made with darning cotton and thread." The November, 1934, *Woman's Home Companion* magazine offered a kit of two Ackley dolls with bodies stamped on muslin.

Dolls To Make For Fun And Profit is just as charming and useful today as it was when first published in 1938. Although it's now out of print, so many copies were printed (Mine is from the 25th printing!) that used copies are still

around. It's worth the search to have one on your bookshelf.

If any of you can fill out the gaps in this sketchy biography, or have information about other cloth dollmakers of the past whose contributions to the craft were noteworthy, please write to me: Colette Wolff, Box 396, Planetarium Station, New York, NY 10024. I'll collate the information for future articles in *The Cloth Doll*.

And don't forget to sign your dolls!

Edith Flack Ackley's marionettes, illustrated by Leta Bergman, from a lithograph by Stow Wengenroth.

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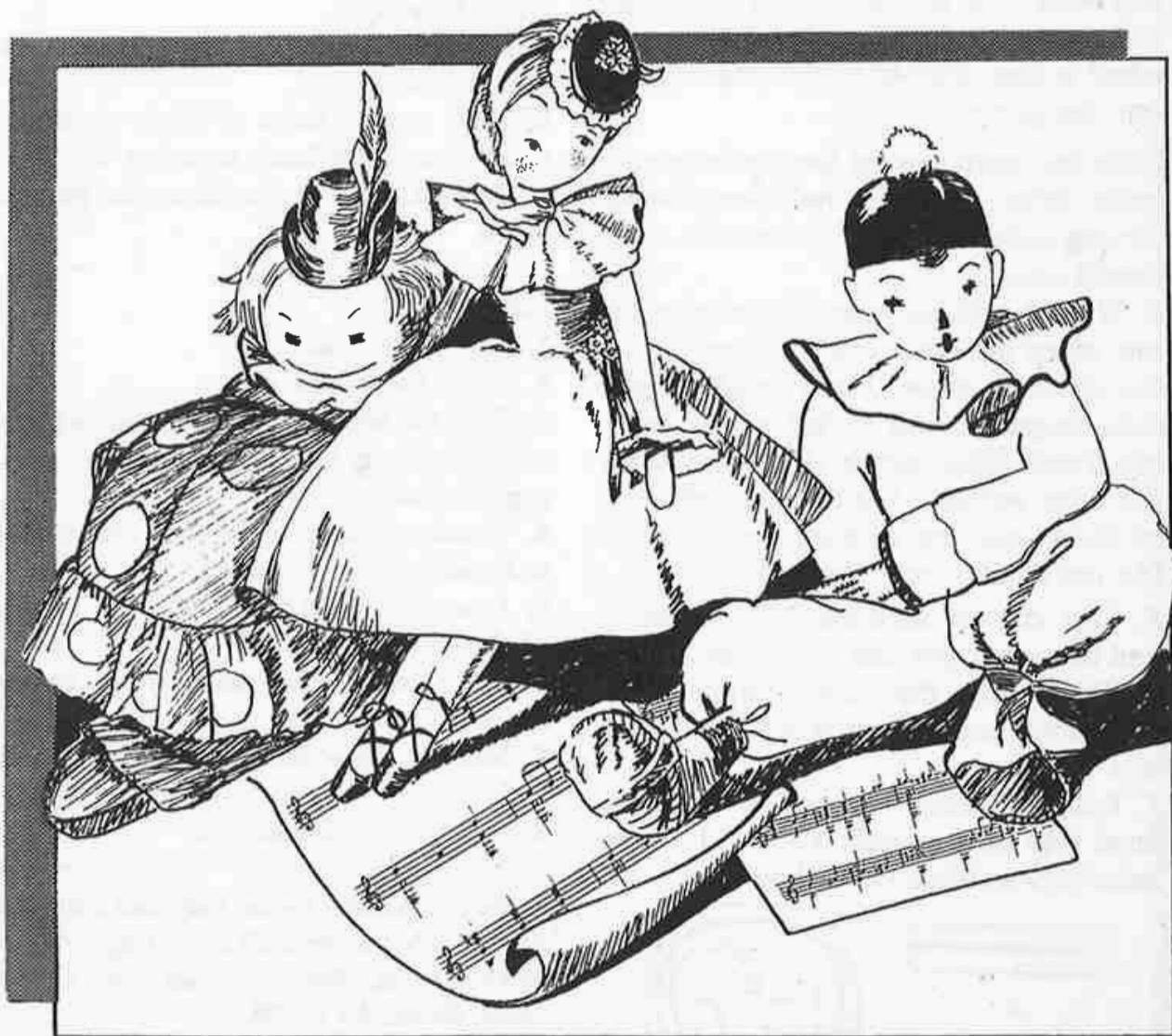


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Documenting the Past

by Colette Wolff

Kaethe Kruse

Although I've designed and made lots of dolls, I was never interested in collecting dolls until I saw a child doll made by the German dollmaker and designer Kaethe Kruse. It was the expression on the face that got to me: sweet, innocent, vulnerable, serious, sad—in the process of becoming in an uncertain world. I wanted to hold and comfort that little doll person. I had never responded that way to a doll before.

No wonder. Kruse's life in Germany spanned two devastating world wars. She had seven children. She made her first doll in 1905 for their oldest daughter because her husband, the sculptor Max Kruse, disliked the breakable dolls marketed for children at that time—dolls that he considered cold, stiff, overdressed and unreal.

Challenged by the dollmaker's art, Kaethe continued making dolls for her children, working to create dolls that paid attention to "the emotions as an important part of the self," a concept alien to the German dollmaking industry of the day, and to fabricate a washable cloth doll with modelled facial features accomplished without seams. In 1910, having developed procedures that realized those goals, she sent a few of her cloth dolls to an exhibition of homemade toys presented in a Berlin department store, and that was the beginning of her dollmaking career.

By 1912, Kruse was producing her "indestructible" cloth dolls commercially in a Berlin factory. As she described the process of creating the muslin head for one of her dolls, "...one has to mould a face first, then a plaster cast



Standing is a Kaethe Kruse doll approximately 18" tall. Seated is a toddler boy doll in a Buster Brown suit.

has to be made, then a reduction to the size of a doll head, and if everything turns out all right, a metal mould has to be made...and because our heads are moulded in hot forms, as one irons the stiff collars on men's shirts, it is a very difficult procedure and takes in all two or three years to complete." Once formed, a head was painted and chemically treated with a fixative for washability before being stitched to its stuffed body.

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Because the making of a Kruse doll involved extensive hand work, each doll was a little different and the dolls were always expensive to buy. Even with the help of assistants, every doll passed through Kruse's hands about 20 times before completion. The dolls were dressed in removable clothing. Typical Kruse dolls were small toddlers under 18" but some dolls were as tall as 32". Most of the dolls were signed and numbered on the sole of the left foot.

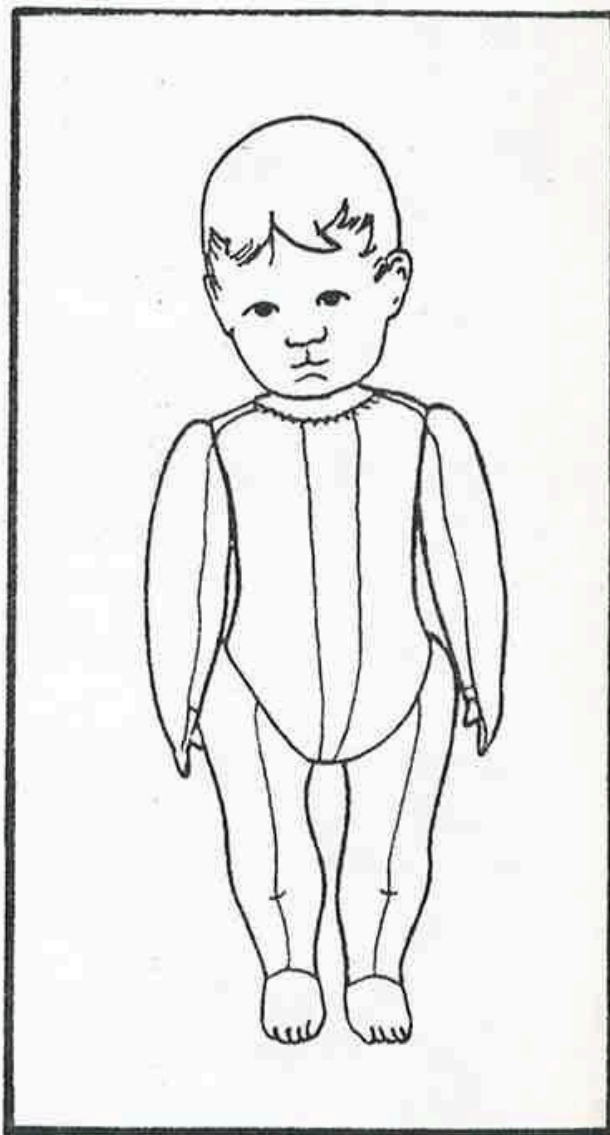
Realism, as Kruse observed it in the children of her life and times, was always her dollmaking inspiration; but it was realism tempered by love and understanding, sensitivity and sympathy to the problems of growing up in a difficult adult world. Many of her dolls were modelled on likenesses of her own children and grandchildren (one doll named Friedebald was supposed to be a childhood likeness of a son who died at age 27). In order to stimulate the imaginations of their small owners, she wanted her dolls to suggest opposites, to be both angelic and mischievous, king's daughter and beggar's child. She also intended her dolls to be teaching tools for "little mothers." She often put bloomers on her girl dolls, eliminating petticoats, to make the dolls easier for a child to dress and undress.

At the beginning of World War II, Kruse's husband died and Hitler ordered her factory closed because he didn't approve of the facial expressions on her dolls. He wanted the world to think of German children as ideally happy, and her dolls didn't communicate a desirably carefree image. Kruse fled to Bavaria where she eventually resumed doll production at a new factory in the town of Donauworth.

Kaethe Kruse, who was born in 1883, died in Donauworth in July of 1968 at the age of 85. Her Donauworth factory is still in business, operated by her children, but contemporary Kaethe Kruse

dolls are hard instead of soft, made of vinyl with a fabric covering. The factory also produces a line of simple cloth dolls designed by Hanne, her daughter.

If you have information about Kaethe Kruse or other past dollmakers of note, Colette would like to hear from you. Anyone interested in helping Colette with research for future columns is also encouraged to write to her. Write to: Colette Wolff, Box 396, Planetarium Station, New York, NY 10024.



Sketch of an undressed Kruse doll showing typical figure proportions and seaming, moulded and painted head stitched to the torso, disc-jointed arms and legs, stitch-defined toes and fingers with thumbs sewn on separately.