

# 2010 ODACA Artist: *Theresa May*

BY LAUREL SASS

**T**heresa May was just 9 years old when she made her first doll. "It was a white rag doll about 6 inches tall with yellow yarn hair, an embroidered face and a smock of black print fabric. Everything was sewn by hand. I still have it!" she exclaims. Theresa continued on and off with dollmaking after that.

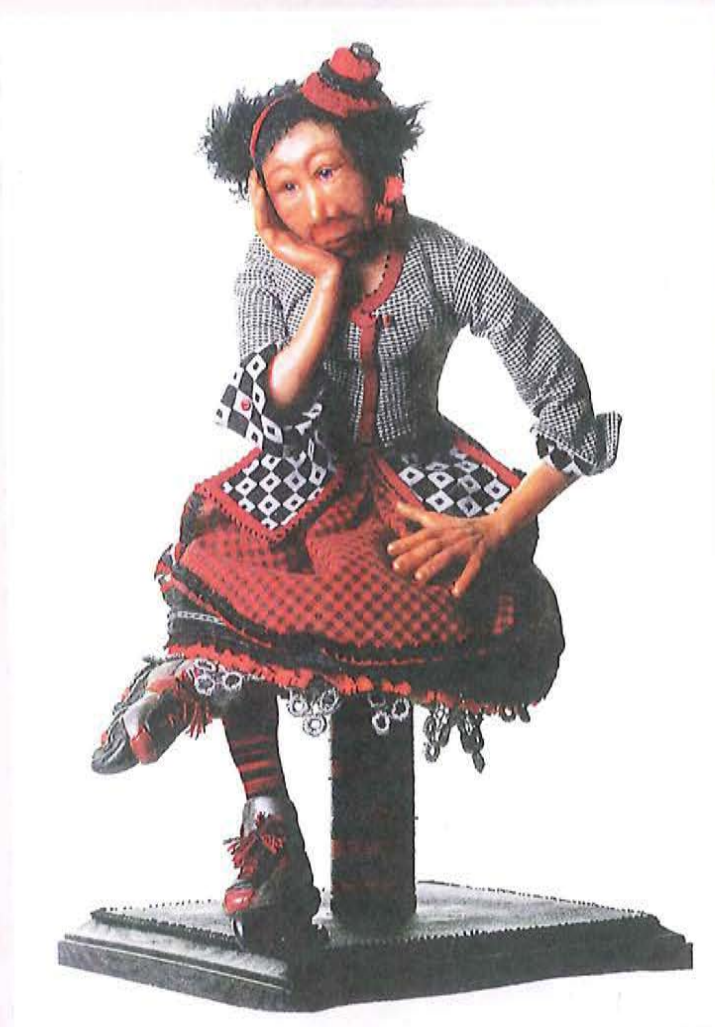


Photo by Yoanna Baumgartner

Theresa was a miniaturist and polymer 1:12 scale doll artist and a nationally recognized teddy bear artist in the early '80s. "However, I did not do any creative work except theatre design from the '90s until 2006, when my current phase of dollmaking began," she explains. "I originally started making stuffed dolls as a way to get



Birdie



The Countess of Checkered Past Ponders Her Next Move

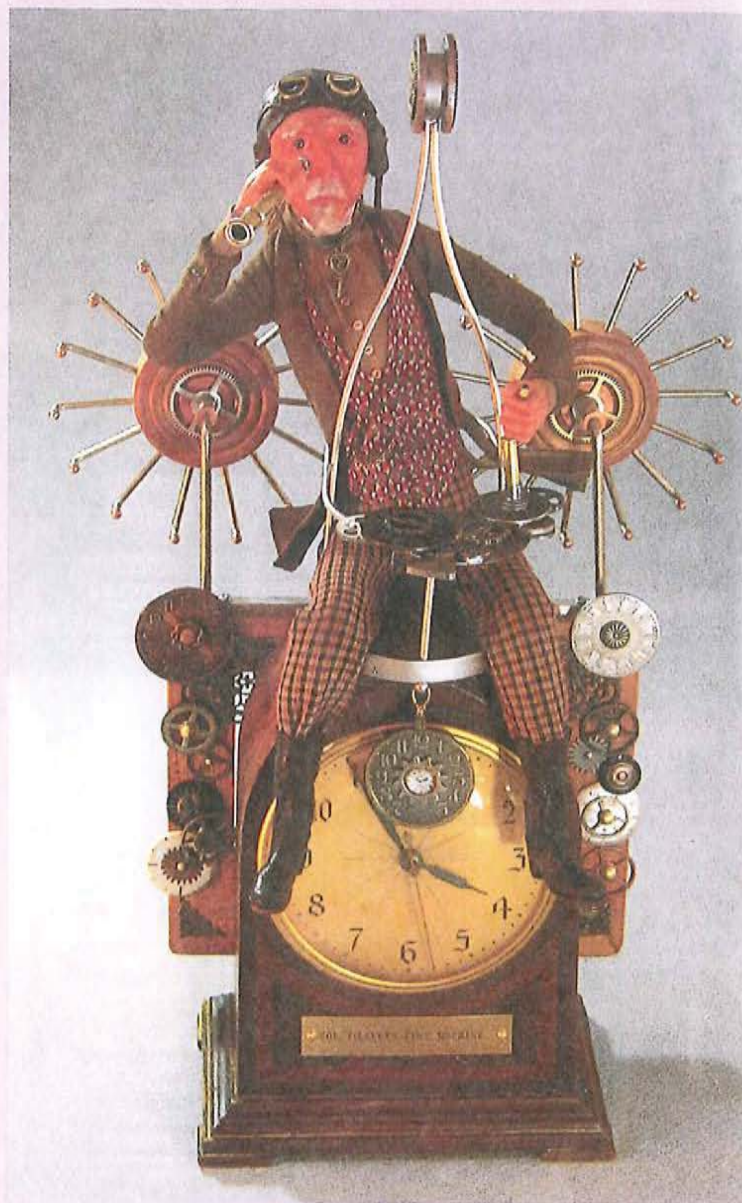
back into the groove, but after years of working in fabric, I wanted a more sculpturally expressive medium." Her initial goal was to explore all the new and improved materials available since she had last worked in polymer. "My first head was a paper clay monkey (Lady Pinkersley), after which I went on to experiment with ProSculpt, other new polymer clays and epoxy clays."

Most of Theresa's dolls are one-of-a-kind originals built over a wire armature, wrapped with batting and/or stuffed and finished with a body stocking. They are usually posable to some degree. "When I start on a new piece, I always have the goal of trying something I've never tried before or teaching myself some new technique or procedure, so I often encounter challenges of a technical nature. However, because my approach to most pieces is organic, this is actually fun. I love solving the puzzles and seeing unexpected results, and I've often said that my biggest talent is fixing the things that I screw up! I'm also often happier with the revised piece than I would have been with the original idea. I'm the original 'inspiration in the midst of chaos' girl," Theresa says.

Theresa designs and produces all of her own costumes. This can involve sewing, quilting, beading, dyeing, embroidery, knitting, appliqué and fabric sculpture. "Since I was a professional costume designer for more than a decade, working on the clothing is actually one of



Wolfe and Little Red



Col. Filbert's Time Machine

my favorite parts of the creation process. I work by the same standards that I did when dressing an entire cast or designing a show—if it looks right, it is." She continues, "I strive for harmony and visual interest in my work, and so while I'm not a slave to absolute scale or historical accuracy, my rule is that nothing should call undue attention to itself unless that thing is the point of the piece. By the same token, if I've applied the 'rules' and something doesn't look right to me, I pitch the rulebook right over my shoulder and keep working until I have something that satisfies my eye. I have absolutely no fear about ripping out and starting over."

Theresa's dolls are inspired by the people and animals she sees around herself every day, filtered through a long association with the theatre and a lifetime of reading, writing and movie-going. "Whether ideas appear to me as fantasy, history or drama, I look for the connections between the human and natural worlds.

"My favorite aspect of creating dolls is visualizing them. I'm always impatient with the middle part where all do-and-wait stages have to be attended to. I'm more excited by the first inklings of inspiration and then seeing the final touches bring a piece to life." If she had to choose one thing, though, "I'd probably pick pawing through my stash of fabrics and trims to see what gets me fizzy."

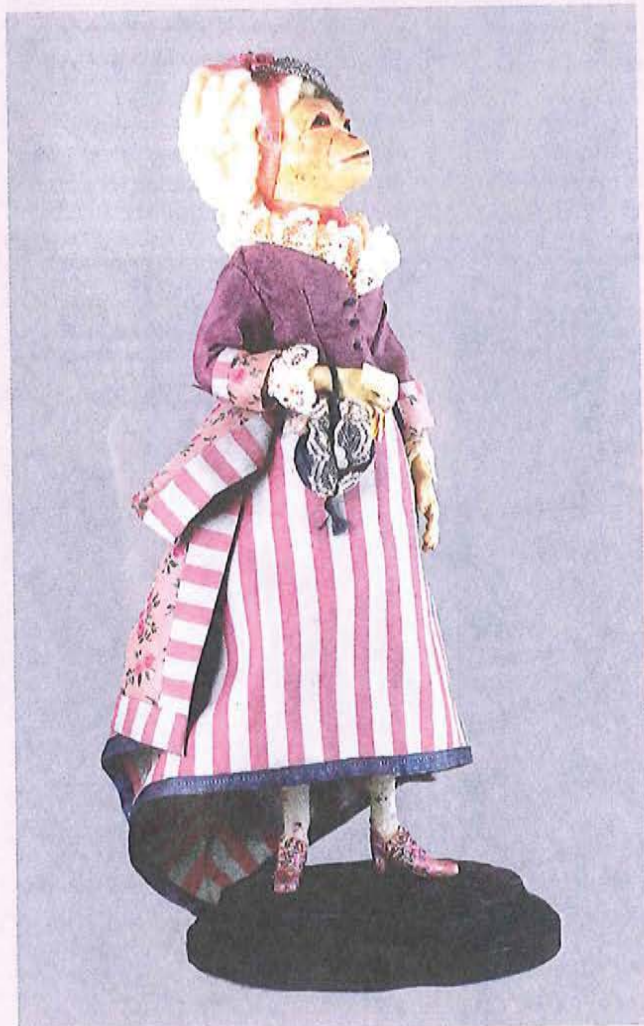
Future plans for Theresa are evident. "I hope to continue learning all kinds of things, trying new materials and techniques, and just playing in the studio. When I retire from my career work as a publisher in about three years, I hope to be set up to do art full-time, with an array of skills that will allow me to execute anything I can dream up. Meanwhile, I go to bed thinking about art and I get up every morning with a head full of ideas," she explains.

On becoming a member of the Original Doll Artists Council of America, Theresa "was thrilled, honored, and somewhat amazed to become a member of ODACA. The opportunity to be part of a group of active, abundantly and diversely talented and recognized artists was exactly the stimulus I needed to really visualize myself as a professional doll artist. The challenge now is to realize that vision. I do want to be part of that larger conversation about the intersection of art and dollmaking."

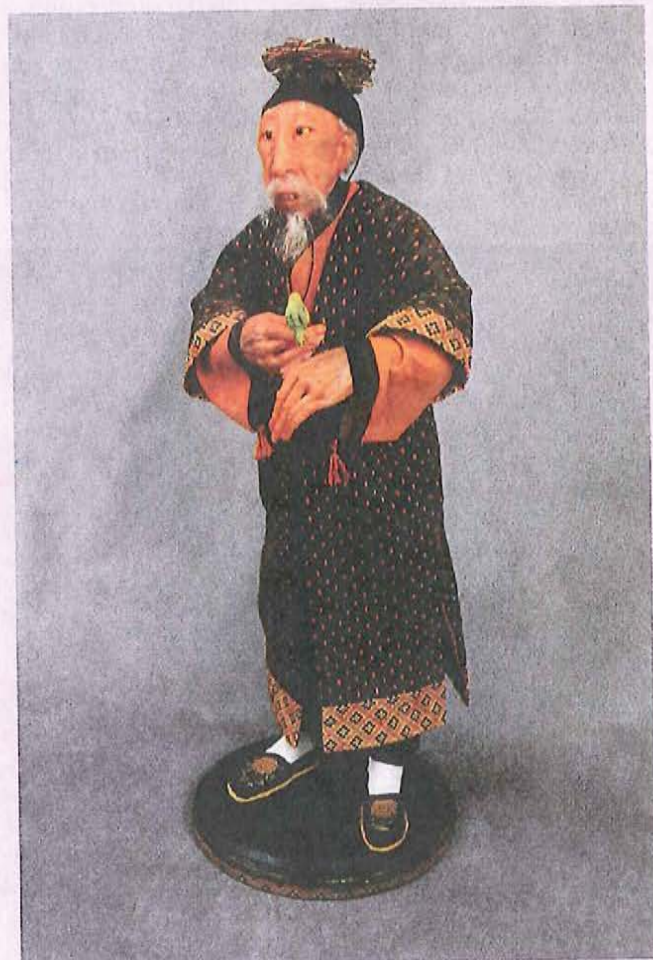
*Theresa May, missterymay@yahoo.com.*



Fish Queen



Lady Pinkersley



Chen Fu's Lovebird