

# Feature



## Wearable Cloth Fantasy Dolls *Kayta Barrows*

*A casual project lead to a decade-long love affair with designing and creating wearable fantasy dolls with personalities of their own. Kayta introduces you to them.*

It started out as just another sewing project. I was going to make a few cloth dolls and dress them – end of project. But before they were even finished, the dolls took on personalities and started making demands.

One wanted some of the yarn from the sweater I was working on, for her hair. Another one told me I had to make two sisters for her. When I stopped sewing on the three of them, they started sewing on themselves, without me - they're the ones in the images on this page.

### Editor's Note

Kayta Barrows started to write an article on her beloved dolls for this issue. Illness slowed down the project over the past summer, and when she became unable to continue writing it herself, she asked me to use additional material from her web site to edit this article.



When I think about it, they're nothing but dolls, and can't really talk. But the next moment, there they are with their little cloth hands in my bead drawer.

We seem to have arrived at a truce. I call myself a professional doll-maker, and they try to be decorative (if not helpful) around the house. They try not to make a mess of my unused quilt fabric (although they claim it's all doll fabric now). And so far nobody has taken a liking to my lace hankies. But since then, I haven't been able to do much sewing for myself, trying to keep up with them...

Now I'd like to introduce you to some of my favorite fantasy dolls. The three on this page are for display only. Others are designed to be worn as you wander around sci-fi/fantasy conventions or just go out and about. Some of my favorite conversations have been with people who stop to ask me about my dolls.

*Photos © 2003, Matt Rollefson.*

### **Miranda Goshawk**

I made a costume, hat, wand, and very-copyrighted Cornish pixie, for the bookstore party celebrating the release of the fifth Harry Potter book. I figured that since Miranda Goshawk (author of *The Standard Book of Spells, grades one thru seven*) would probably never appear in a Harry

Potter film, I could say I was her and nobody would know the difference.



The picture was taken before midnight, before I got my hands on my own copy of the book. It's anybody's guess how Ms. Goshawk got a Cornish pixie, or why she would want one, but it is chained by the ankle to a metal bit on her sleeve.

I don't own the copyright on the pixie, so I cannot sell reproductions of it.

*Photo © 2003, John O'Halloran.*

## Renaissance Faire Crowd



This is Molly Slightly, who works at an Ale Stand at the Renaissance Faire. She is relaxing after a hard day's work pouring soda for the visitors. She has her mug, leather pouch, wooden bowl, and belt knife, all attached to her sash. She actually passed costume approval at one of the Northern California Ren. Faires, before she got that nose ring.



This jester doesn't actually work at the Renaissance Faire, he just goes there to dress up and have fun. Let's hope he doesn't have too much fun...

*Photos © 2004 Marjorie Wilser.*

## Fairies and Imps



The Blue Floral Fairy (they never tell me their real names) was the first Fairy to sit on my shoulder. She's my constant companion at places like quilt shows and embroidery stores, and keeps a lookout for more of what she calls 'Fairy skin'. The other Fairies talk to her if they know I'm going shopping, and she lets me know what they'd like me to bring home. I have a big pinwheel just like her little one.



This spotted pink Imp had allergies so bad at my house (we have cats) that she moved in with somebody else.



I hadn't known that some Fairies had bat-like wings till I met this one. She looks more like an Imp to me, but always claimed to be a Fairy. She lives in a different part of the forest nowadays, with a friend she met at a science fiction convention.

*Photos © 2003, Gerald Perkins.*



This is an especially magical Imp. The photographer caught her just as some sparkles were coming out of her hand. I think she wanted to wake up the cat.



Here's another Imp, who looks like she has just caught a falling star.



This Imp is another companion of mine. She prefers bookstores and science fiction conventions to quilt shows, and

accompanies me when the blue floral Fairy stays home. I make her keep her pet beetle on a leash.

*Photos © 2004, Marjorie Wilser.*

### **Mermaids**



Aurora currently lives at the Hyde Street Pier in San Francisco, in the office of the volunteer coordinator. She tells me she can swim in the bay any time she wants to,

or play with the sea lions at Pier 39. But mostly she sits on a shelf and supervises.

Since I made Aurora's acquaintance, she has introduced me to several other mermaids; they don't seem to stay for very long.

*Photo © 2003, Gerald Perkins.*

### **Other Folks**



This is an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other shoulder just like in the cartoons, an eleven-year-old informs me. They are, of course, both trying to whisper the best advice to my mannequin head. But she's not listening. This pair of dolls lives with a friend of mine now.

*Photo © 2003, Gerald Perkins.*



We all know this guy. He used to sit on my shoulder, so I refused to give him teeth when he asked for them. He has recently flown away to live with a friend of mine in Santa Clara, California. I hope he isn't just trying to put the bite on her.

*Photo © 2003, Matt Rollefson.*



I'm not sure where this tourist is from, but he seems to have visited Hawaii. He stayed with me for a while, then went traveling again. His last postcard said he was living somewhere in California, with someone he met at BayCon, a Northern California Science Fiction convention.

*Photo © 2003 Gerald Perkins, 2003.*

### Juggler Vest



Ayesley, Beasley, and Ceasley are performers in a small circus. Ayesley has lost two of the buttons he was juggling. That's him on the front of my vest, looking confused. One lost button landed in the buttonhole above his head and is holding the vest together, but he hasn't spotted it yet.



His partners Beasley, on my shoulder, and Ceasley, down my back, are trying to retrieve the other lost button, which has caught in the folds at the back of the vest. Ayesley, Beasley, and Ceasley all perform in the same circus that Mr. Beak, the clown, performs in.



*Photos © 2003, Matt Rollefson.*

### Acrobats



These are Geezley, on the left, and Jeesley, on the right. They are cousins of the jugglers on my vest. Jeesley has just moved in with a couple of friends of mine in Santa Rosa.

*Photos (left) © 2003, Matt Rollefson, (right) © 2003, Gerald Perkins.*

### Belly Dancers



Here is Sarah with her belly dancers. That's AraBella on the front, who dances Cabaret style. AraBella is fond of Whiting & Davis mesh, Lurex brocade, and other sparkly things.





The close-up shows CaraBella, who dances California Tribal style. She is wearing several pieces of actual ethnic jewelry. In the other image CaraBella is bumping backsides with BellaBella, in purple, who is wearing the same sort of outfit Sarah wears when she dances. This was my first commissioned vest.

*Photos © 2003, Bruce MacDermott*

### **Other Dolls**



The Virtual Costumer Volume 9, Issue 1

Sometimes I experiment with other soft media. She may be The Spirit of the Corn Harvest, since she was made in October.



-24-

Mr. Beak wants to run away from the circus and become an accountant. I made him ten years ago, my last venture into papier-mâché for heads and hands. He condescendingly suggested that if I thought I was so clever I should try making an all-cloth hand puppet, and see how I liked that.



Well, I liked it just fine. An unfinished blue hand puppet is my prototype for an all-cloth puppet, and he seems to be much less hard-nosed about things than Mr. Beak is.

*Photos © 2003, Matt Rollefson*

**Kayta Barrows** was a historical costumer with a special interest in historical interpretation. She was a founding member of the Greater Bay Area Costumers' Guild (GBACG). See "Kayta Barrows: A Remembrance in" [VC vol. 8, issue 4.](#)