Babies and Fairy Dust – Shawna Clymer

by Pam North

Doll artists often fall into their craft in strange and unforeseen ways. Washington artist Shawna Clymer, of Clymer Creations, had such a beginning, and readily shared her experience. “While searching on line for additions to my lion collection, I ran across a doll wearing a lion shirt on Ebay. The doll was similar to one I that had bought for my daughter as a Christmas present. However, even though it had the same face, this one had been changed to look more realistic through the process of reborning. I became interested in just creating a similar doll for my daughter, but instead this began my career as a reborn doll artist in 2001. This endeavor allowed me to stay at home with my family and also earn an income. In 2004, one of my reborn dolls sold on Ebay for $2,645, which was far more than the $250 they normally sold for in 2001. I couldn't believe it! She was an Ashton Drake 'Sweet Pea', by Linda Webb, that I had transformed into an African-American version. She was one of my favorite reborns.”

Reborns often are the first step before baby doll artists evolve and begin to create original dolls, and Clymer soon succumbed to the challenge. “Still wanting to do more as an artist I bought two bars of clay; one bar was Cernit, and the other was Prosculpt. I always had wanted to sculpt babies, and fairies so, using a butter knife, crochet hook, a brand-new cuticle pusher, and my own two hands, I made an armature out of aluminum foil and tape. I slowly worked with the Prosculpt, adding clay until I had created a face. I was so pleased that it actually looked human, and to me at the time, pretty realistic. Trying to do both reborns and original sculptures became very difficult, with my family responsibilities and everyday schedules, so I decided that I would focus more on sculpting than reborning. Staying up late after everyone else had gone to bed, working until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, was tough at times, but it always was worth it as I would watch the faces slowly emerge from the clay. From the start, it was my dream to offer my original sculptures recreated into vinyl reborn kits for other reborn artists to use.”

Her efforts turned toward the magical world of fairies and mermaids, and she merged those concepts with her adorable, lifelike babies, creating her own niche in doll artistry. Delicate fairy ears and sculptured mermaid tails became part of her kits.

As with most artists, Clymer had to work diligently to learn her craft. “I remember wishing, in the beginning of my sculpting journey, that I could find a shortcut or secret to sculpting better and faster. Honestly, though, I don't think that there is such a thing; you just get more proficient over time through lots and lots of practice.”

Clymer loves sculpting a variety of sizes and faces, but her favorite to create are the 5” to 7” babies. “There's something that just tugs a little harder on my heartstrings when a tiny precious baby sits perfectly in my hand,” she says. “To me they're even more amazing at their smallest. I can sculpt a group of 5 little heads in two or three days, but then it will take me over a month to create the limbs. I always have little heads lying around because of this,” she laughs. “Some of my sculptures, ranging in size from 2" to 22", are recreated into vinyl and offered as limited-edition reborn kits. Each kit consists of the blank vinyl head, arms and legs, or tail if it is a mermaid kit. To date I have made 29 different original reborn kits since 2005, offered through my website to reborn artists worldwide. Of those kits, 14 have been fairy baby kits, with the first fairy offered in 2006. Currently, two are mermaid reborn kits, complete with mermaid tails. All of my kits are limited editions, and are accompanied with certificates of authenticity. I hope to offer many more in 2016 (babies, fairies, and a few surprises), and I encourage anyone interested to please sign up on my web site for my newsletter featuring my latest Clymer Creations.”

She continued, “I've always believed that anything is possible if you really believe in yourself. You can do anything if you really want it, but it involves working long hours, getting very little sleep, and sometimes ordering pizza for dinner instead of cooking. I don't keep late night hours as much anymore, now that I have my days to myself, working in my studio while my son is at school and my husband is at work. I read a quote once that said 'It's better to be unique, than perfect'. I don't think my work is perfect, or ever will be, because once you think you're perfect, you have nothing else to learn. I always want to learn more - more details, more styles. That's what it's all about, in my opinion. As a self-taught artist, I am so thankful to be blessed with a wonderfully supportive family who have fed my courage to keep at it. Looking back now at my first sculpt in 2005, I have no idea why they had faith in me, but I am so thankful that they did!”

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