



DOLLS & their best friends

by Christine A. Verstraete

happen when that favorite Riley or ball-jointed doll is paired with a dog their own size.

That magic has rubbed off on San Franciscan fiber artist Barlee Rumburg of Fog City Designs whose specialty is creating amazingly life-like dog "sculptures" that any doll owner (and doll) will adore.

Barlee says, "I'm not content to simply portray a breed in a wool sculpture. In order to capture life-like qualities, the *inside* of the dog - his spirit or soul - must also be portrayed."

A life-long artist who's done life casting, murals, floor cloths, graphic illustration,

various sculptures, faux finishes, and even building, Barlee had one medium yet to explore - photography. After deciding to write and illustrate a story with photos for her granddaughter who was also a dog lover, Barlee began to look for an appropriate model. She discovered Mary Holstad's soft sculptures, but they were too large and the artist preferred not to make a smaller size. Then last year, Carol Williams of Sierra Meadows Bears introduced Barlee to the old-fashioned craft of needle felting - and a whole new world of creativity.

"I have sculpted in plaster, clay, concrete and a myriad of other odd

materials, but never wool," Barlee says. "I found it, first of all, very kind to the hands (if you can avoid stabbing yourself with those WICKED needles!) and extremely forgiving. Another huge feature of working in this medium for me is that it is all organic and requires the simplest of tools and materials. My little dogs are born out of nothing but loose wool fibers and a viciously barbed needle."

The dogs are made simply by "forming" the shape from loose wool fibers with a special barbed needle. The dogs are solid and seamless, and fully poseable with jointed heads and limbs. She also fashions some dogs in semi-permanent positions so they are lying or sitting down.



Top left: 8" Tula Kish and 4 1/4" tall Basset Hound, "Hoover." (Not for sale.)

Left to right: Kish's Minuk and Spring Pearl with Crystal the Collie, 5" tall, (Not for sale.)
Dolls' clothes: Becky Colvin, Sew-Cool Sweaters & Separates.) Kish's 11 1/2" Bethany and Chihuahuas.
Clothing: Kirsty Hogan, "Persnickety," Bethany Kish and Molly, Brenda Starr in Colvin jeans and canine pals, 7 1/2" Riley Kish with 5" tall/7" long Harlequin Great Dane. Dog, \$200. Riley dress: Aunt Jude's Treasures.

Photos: Fog City Designs



Even if they won't admit it, almost every collector at one time or another has "talked" to one of their favorite dolls.

The question is: have they ever stopped to listen to what the dolls were saying?

If you did, you may be surprised to learn that dolls like dogs, too. It must be true since something magical seems to



Barlee's first dog, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, fetched an impressive \$76 on eBay. While Barlee was thrilled - especially since she started the dog at a selling price of \$2.99 not sure of how to price it - she wasn't fully satisfied as her early dogs were more like toys or teddy bears. Her goal was to make them appear as realistic as possible. "The face, the eyes, the body language, the movement, posture, expression, all play important roles in sculpting my dogs," she says.

**Barlee Rumburg at
Fog City Designs**
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limited commissions being accepted.

Ask her how long it takes to create her dogs and she says, "the best answer I've been able to come up with is, 'a very long time!'"

Creation actually takes from two to

three days, and yes, sometimes more. What took longest, she admits, was initially she had a hard time choosing the type of wool to use. "Did you know there are hundreds of varieties of sheep?" she



Clockwise from left: 7 1/2" vintage Madame Alexander doll, Ireland, with Dalmatian pups, "Pippa" and "Petula." Dogs are 4" x 4 1/2" \$165. Riley Kish, first oak polymer clay baby and "Crystal" the Collie. Kish's Riley and Pembroke Welsh Corgi, "Digger", Picnic set - 10 piece picnic set with dog, \$200 (Doll not included.) Dog is 3 1/2" tall and 5" long. 16" BJD Sharmin Serendipity and Boxer dog "Harley." He is 5" long, sitting only, \$200.



asks. "I spent months picking out the right wool for needle felting."

She begins with fresh, raw wool which she processes herself and then aligns using antique carding combs. She's then ready to begin – that is once she gets a hint of the type of companion that a certain doll would like.

Besides finding a market for her

creations, Barlee has found her own selection of dolls has expanded to include Tiny Kitty Collier, Georgia from the Anne Estelle line, Jan McLean's 12" Lollipop Girl Milli from Milan, a vintage Madame Alexanderkin, Ireland, a new Ginny, Effanbee's Brenda Starr, Helen Kish's Riley and Bethany, and several 9" Girl Of Many Lands dolls, such as Minuk (her favorite), and 16" BJD Sharmin Serendipity. She also has Norman from the Richard Simmons line "Nana's Family" by artist Annie Wahl. "He makes the perfect grandfather for Riley Kish," she adds.



She's so inspired that Barlee wants to make even more with dolls.

"Dolls have re-captured my heart in such a way that I am expanding my line to include Ooak art dolls (babies and children), and original fashions for dolls," she says. "I am also inspired by the work of doll artist Maggie Iacono who makes the most wonderful little girls in felt! As time allows, I will be researching this technique and hope, at some point, to create fine quality felted dolls as companions for my dogs."

