

Spirit Dolls

In August, 2004 I created the Medicine Doll Project curriculum and offered artists, art doll makers, art therapists, and healers to become participants in an online group through Yahoo called The Healing Doll Project. This is the online part of a research project exploring what can happen when people use dollmaking (artmaking) to effect change in a health issue such as chronic pain, disease, stress, depression, etc.

In 2006 the class was called Medicine Dolls: How to Make Healing Dolls for Yourself. I used this class description.

Dollmaking can help you to heal at a physical, emotional, mental and spiritual level. The essential process of healing yourself with artmaking is one involving creating change so that you can become more conscious and restore your connection to your intuition and your soul. When you are physically ill, in pain, dealing with emotional issues, or challenged by a life changing event, you can start to heal yourself with art by opening up to your inner voices, listening to them, and allowing their messages to emerge.

You will make four medicine dolls: a guardian, a scapegoat, a talisman and an inner healer. Class involves keeping a journal as well as making the dolls. This work will take you through a creative process toward a goal of healing an aspect of yourself and/or your life. Your intention drives the process and keeps you focused. Your journal becomes the record keeper and witness and provides a place for you to dialog with your creations.

I offered the class each year from 2006 until 2014. With each class experience I grew in my knowledge of all ways to make art dolls for healing. The Medicine Doll process continued to evolve and develop with each online and in person class. I originally offered the class in three months segments, then quickly realized that I no one would ever get all the dolls done in three months, so switched to yearlong class offerings.

In 2010 I was asked by the head of the Minnesota State Fair Fine Arts Department to curate a show to be featured in the Fine Arts Center. Purpose: The State Fair Fine Arts Invited Exhibition is to showcase quality art in various media – highlighting the art medium as an artistic class. This year the exhibition is Art Dolls as Art Form. The main purpose of this exhibition is education and showing that art dolls are a recognized and respected art form.



Dreamer Barb Kobe

Dolls represent how we view ourselves from all aspects: emotional, psychological, environmental and spiritual. Through doll making processes, the artist intuitively responds to the merging image, changing, playing and dialoging with it.





Doll shrines are sacred vessels that can function as an offering, a prayer, an expression of gratitude, a request for healing, or an affirmation. A doll shrine become symbolic vehicle that can help you clarify aspects of your life. You will identify and create personal symbols and then use them on your doll. You will learn about different sacred traditions of organizing space and ancient design patterns. This creative, doll making process, from inspiration to completion, will set the energy of change in motion.



There had always been some confusion whether dolls were simply child's playthings, collectors treasures, quilter's ways of playing figures, form and color or were they art. I designed a website, posters, and brochures for the show. I did some research on this subject. This is what I found:

There's no hard and fast definition for an art doll. They can be made out of almost any medium or mixed media. They come in various shapes, sizes, styles, and designs. They can be very realistic or so abstract that barely anything is recognizable on them. They can be human, humanoid, anthropomorphic, alien, fantasy, sci-fi, or just about anything in between.

A doll can communicate an image that engages individuals in a very deep and personal way; a harmony of sensations that awakens emotions and opens the heart to memories and imagination. When there is something universal in the character portrayed, it creates an invitation for the viewers to become part of something that is larger than themselves. It can be a criticism of the world as it is or a vision of the world as it might be. An artist can portray things we've never seen or things that existed in the past...stretching the observer to see things in a different way.
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So what is an art doll? Essentially, it's an original work of art the artist uses to express herself of himself. The reasons for creating art dolls are as varied as are the artists who imagine them into being, just as is true for all types of art, whatever the form and whatever the medium. Then I found this definition.

"The Art Doll is a work of art drawn from the mind and hand of the artist and not bound by the same rules as dolls in other categories. It doesn't not have to be recognizable as a human form. It may be dressed or not. If dressed, the clothes may be carved, sculpted, glued on etc. Any media is permissible and likely. The art doll is judged by the same criteria as any other form of art, i.e., by the principles of design, scale, proportion, contrast, dominance, rhythm, balance, and must be judged for what it IS, nothing else."
 ~Jane Covington – One-of-a-Kind Dollmaker

I looked at the dolls in the show, and knew they fell under the definition of art dolls, but were they healing dolls? After reading this book, and having made dolls in the process, I would guess that you have a fairly good idea of what a healing doll is to you. Healing dolls have similar if not identical structures as an art doll. And they can be made out of any material under the sun and underneath the earth. So how are they different? I think it comes down to the intention of the creator making the healing doll.

The healing doll maker attaches meaningful objects and symbolic emotional metaphors and symbols that she or he attaches to the doll or are hidden within. When done its the story and feelings expressed through the doll when held and viewed by the maker that making it healing.



My personal experience is that a doll becomes a healing when doll when I set a healing intention, go through a creative, transformative process and produce an image (in the doll form) that creates change in the way I feel, think and move through my world.

My friend and colleague Cat Caracelo says it well,

Art as a healing practice, expressive action and transformative process offer threshold experiences. The engagement with self and materials becomes a passage way to the inner realm, where personal and collective wisdom, and information, is held. Once known, seen, heard and recognized, this inner wisdom can be embraced, explored and expressed. Working with image, symbol and form long past the time of creating holds potency, deepens self knowledge and become ones own source material.

In 2014 I started writing this book, and I believe that you have a pretty good idea at this point of what a healing doll is and can possibly look like. End of book, right? Well, maybe not. As I gathered information and did research for this book I kept coming across something called a Spirit Doll. Then people who saw my work said that my dolls were deeply healing, emotional and spiritual. . I wondered, Is a spirit doll an art doll? Can spirit dolls be healing dolls. I realized I could spend a huge amount of my time doing this research and testing it with other dollmakers, maybe even creating a new series of dolls called Spiritual or Spirit Dolls.

I went back and forth in my mind asking myself, do I write a chapter on Spirit Dolls? I made a decision that I would write a chapter on Spirit Dolls but not as a “how to make spirit dolls” – that would maybe be another book in the future.

This chapter is inviting you to explore with me, along with a few other dollmakers, to discover the definition, the meaning and the qualities of a Spirit Doll. I will touch upon the subject. Without going into depth. There are photos of some of my dolls that I believe express my spirit, connect to the spirit, spiritual elements and religious/cultural influences on my dollmaking. Most of the chapter will be an invitation for you to think about the subject and explore, along with me and other dollmakers who I invited to write about the subject and share photos of their dolls.

As you read and think about the subject of Spirit Dolls in the following pages think about the following:

What is your definition of Spirit? Spiritual?

What words the dollmaker use to describe Spirit Dolls?

Where does dollmaker get her inspiration?

What materials does she use to make Spirit Dolls?

Definition of Spirit

the nonphysical part of a person that is the seat of emotions and character; the soul.

"we seek a harmony between body and spirit"



In fact it is now known by neuro-physiologists that art, prayer, and healing all come from the same source in the body, they all are associated with similar brain wave patterns, mind body changes and they all are deeply connected in feeling and meaning. Art, prayer, and healing connect us to our inner world, the world of imagery and emotion, of visions and feelings.



Spiritual or Spirituality

Spirituality is about wholeness/holiness/alignment with the emotional, intellectual, psychic and physical self. It values life, creativity, empathy, receptivity, diversity and the natural cycles that ensure constant change. Shekhinah Morgan

“The spiritual perspective is a way of understanding life that provides meaning to our day-to-day experiences and the larger issues of living and dying. Spirituality sees wholes rather than parts, and patterns rather than details. When we are guided by this perspective, life seems to make sense, everything is in its place, and we feel balanced and connected. This deeper sense of self and nature is satisfying to the soul and spirit. It can have profound effects on personal attitudes, values, relationships, and unresolved conflicts, and as a consequence it can influence biochemistry and physiology. I call these effects on the mind and body spiritual healing.”

© Elliott Dacher, M.D. (From *Whole Healing: A Step-by-Step Program to Reclaim Your Power to Heal*, Dutton, 1996)

Exploring the Definition of Spirit Doll

A Spirit Doll is an art doll that acts as a vessel for “holding” spiritual things: blessings, prayers; meditation meaning to focus on and hold; gratitude, connection, emotion and more. These types of dolls are often found on altars where they are objects of devotion or a reminder of a life changing experience.

A Spirit Doll is an icon, a tangible, cultural image of the Divine found in world religions and used in church rituals, religious ceremonies, sacred rituals or on a personal altar. They might be sculptures of saints or holy figures, ancestors, angels, gods and goddess.

A Spirit Doll is a three-dimensional art doll that holds prayers, longings and visually symbolizes my connection to all there is. A Spirit doll reflects what I think of as meaningful to me at a conscious and unconscious level.

A Spirit Doll represents something about life that is important to you or a process, journey, learning that affected you deeply and helped you change an aspect of your life. A Spirit Doll’s making guides the maker deeper into the knowing and connecting with self and those she is in relationship with.

A Spirit Doll may represent elements of nature like Mother Earth, a garden, animal, earth, air, fire, water - any thing visible or invisible that animates the vital principle that gives life to physical organisms.

A Spirit Doll is used to inspire the maker to move toward dreams or visions. The making of a Spirit Doll an “activity of consciousness or spirit, such as prayer, meditation, or ecstatic dance, intended to support collective healing and social change. Subtle Activism grows from the idea that there are many effective ways – some newly emerging, many as old as humanity – to positively influence social change other than overt political action.”

Source: The Garfield Project.



Spiritual Healing

I will not go into depth on this subject; perhaps it will appear in a future publication. However, this book on dollmaking and healing would not be complete without a mention on the subject of spirituality and healing.

The spiritual and healing experience is personal in nature and there are many paths to it and different names for it that include prayer, devotion, love, compassion, meditation, music, dance, art, and nature.

Spiritual Healing results from a way of being rather than a way of doing. It is activated when you experience a sense of wholeness within your being. When you make healing dolls using this process you are involved with your body, mind and emotions resulting, most times in a sense of peace and deeper understanding of yourself and your connection to life. Spiritual healing suggests making a connection with a higher power or wisdom and bringing a persistent sense of oneness with life. Spiritual healing's goal is for you to reach a sense of wholeness; it relies on our intuitive knowledge, an often unused aspect of our consciousness. This personal intelligence; your inner wisdom and guidance; often called the small, quiet voice, operates by speaking to us of a unifying and integrated vision of life, and a sense of meaning, purpose, and coherence. Intuitive voices come from your gut instinct, compassionate heart, imagination and creative inner visionary, and what some these days like to call "the Universe". Your intuition is best communicated with and express through symbols, art, poetry, sacred spaces, religion, and myth. It is not unusual for the women who have made healing dolls with me within this process to rediscover their intuitive voice.

Faith is a word often used in spiritual healing. Faith is strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof. In fact, many of the searches I did on the subject of healing led me to resources that spoke of prayer and other religious faith practices in order to maintain a sense of peace and balance. I believe that resources from all faith communities, along with some kind of personal creative action can provide continuity and transcendent meaning to life. There is another definition of faith and that is "complete trust or confidence in someone or something". Other words that are used in this meaning are trust, belief, confidence, conviction. I have seen women making healing dolls, from across the globe, who have discovered or rediscovered their connection to a transcendent power. I also have witnessed them gaining faith and confidence in themselves as a good, powerful, loving, creative woman. Many of them reach a deeper understanding of their day-to-day lives, their place in their world, and their connection to others. I think either kind of definition of faith has a place in the discussion of spirit and spiritual art, that when seen by the creator or others creates a shift in awareness, a change in consciousness and deeper connection to something greater than ourselves, and that's a good thing.



A doll can be a tool, works on the artist as the artist works on it. It instructs, contains the sacred, represents the deep desire of the body to recreate itself, expresses every emotion from anger to love, pain to joy., It embellishes space. A doll allows you to see who you are.

elinor peace bailey

Barb Kobe Spirit Dolls

A Spirit Doll - Barb Kobe



The Saint

In 2002 I began reading about feminist psychology and women's spirituality. I was raised in the Catholic church and participated in Catechism, First Communion and Confirmation. Any healing intentions at this time were to raise awareness about my beliefs, learn, grow and explore physical, mental, emotional and/or spiri-

tual life through my doll making. I remembered the rich symbolism of in Catholic Churches: altars, relief sculptures on walls, shrines, statues of holy people and saints; decorative priests' garments, banners, chalices, and candles. The Saint was one of the first flat dolls. I drew the design first, knowing that I wanted an arch shape at the top, a halo around the head and little, tiny indentations for little dolls to rest in. I remember I was reading Sue Monk Kid's *Dance of the Dissident Daughter*. I read "I was amazed to find that I had no idea how to unfold my spiritual life in a feminine way. I was surprised, and, in fact, a little terrified, when I found myself in the middle of a feminist spiritual reawakening." I began to look at the messages women were getting from the church in the 1950's and 60's that I am unworthy of love, that I must give take care of others first and that I should always be a good girl-saintly. The doll's hands come together over her heart (self-love), and she is looking inward for self reflection. The three rectangles at the bottom have little dolls resting inside, "pieces of herself", having come home after being "spent" taking care of others. I used green to represent heart chakra; red for women's sensuality; and purple for spirit.

Spirit or Spiritual Dolls can represent an awakening to a new way of connecting and being with a woman's higher power



Ode to Tree Mother

is designed from a tree that was hit by lightning standing in a park in Jordan, MN. I stood in the center of this tree and felt a connection.

I have always been drawn to nature for inspiration. You might recall, that I first began making my dolls from roots and sticks. This book started with a college research paper written on the subject of dollmaking and healing. It was blessed by my college English teacher when he returned my "marked-free" paper to me and said, "This is good, you should

write a book".

I designed my original Medicine Doll curriculum and classes upon a four part process based on the Native American Medicine Wheel and Earth Based Spirituality symbols of earth, air, fire and water.

Teaching Medicine dolls put me on a path of discovery; one with lots of side trails, hills and valley, and secret hiding places but always breadcrumbs to follow and always a quiet, gentle voice and often playful guiding me. Mentors and allies would appear to support and gently nudge me forward. Spirited and creative dollmakers and their dolls appeared to inspire me and shine a light on the possibility that dollmaking could be healing....and spiritual.

I have chosen a few dollmakers who make spirit dolls who have touched my life and supported the development of this book. Pictures of their dolls and the stories are in this chapter. They are just a few of the many spirited teachers, artists, and students from all my classes who have touched my heart and soul.

elinor peace bailey - The Spirit of the Spirit Doll



I was young when I took on the word artist to describe myself. It was not because I was all that deft at the craft but more a matter of acknowledging that I had found my voice. I have been drawing since I could smear it on

walls and that is why my work has improved and my voice has become stronger. Initially I saw myself as a painter. As a traveling teacher, I have found many of my students and fellow teachers whose work was better than my own but I have been compelled to continue and I believe there is room on this path for as many as desire to follow it so there is no need to compete for a single spot.

I love the human figure, particularly the female form. It feels like a landscape to me and is a constant in my work, as is the face. Manipulating the proportions and the placement of the body and the face has infinite possibilities and I delight in exploring them. Using mixed media comes from the inclination to grab whatever is at hand to create an image. I diverged from the use



of a canvas when my projects were put in jeopardy by my children. Discovering fabric gave me an answer to that problem and led me to stitchery, then to quilts and then to dolls where I found a form that took my attention for over 30 years. Now as I move on into being an observer, I find that what compels me is telling stories, connecting with people and connecting disparate objects one to another. Performing with the dolls provided me with an audience for those stories. They served in connecting me with people, and my garments, mixed media journals and quilts have added to the chorus and I guess I'm not done yet.

In my work you will find my love the human figure, particularly the female form consistently in my work, as is the manipulation of proportions. Mixed media and the third dimension, comes from the inclination to grab whatever is at hand to create an image with my art journaling, doll making, quilting and stitchery.

THE SPIRIT OF THE SPIRIT DOLL

The figures called "Spirit Dolls" often borrow from a primitive rendering of the human form. A fertility doll will exaggerate the sexual organs. The dolls that use outreached arms reflect Jesus on the cross, the ultimate sacrifice. Using the figure as a circle would mean completion, the dancing figure would represent euphoria and release. Although I can not claim the form for myself I am attracted to the sparse and textured minimalism, and the use of found objects and mixed media which often influences my own creative process.

I would be tempted to change the term "Spirit Doll" to "Doll of the Spirit".

The doll form lends itself to spiritual input from the maker. The spirit does not originate with the form. That would imply it to be a graven image. I avoid those. The dolls I make possess the spirit which I make them with. I give each doll a piece of myself. My experience with dolls led me to use them as performance tools. To break barriers with humor, color and character. Bailey dolls are characters dolls. That's the spirit they have.

www.epbdolls.com

<http://www.epbdolls.typepad.com/>

Brene Busse - Sacred Keepers



Sometimes I think that every piece I make is a spirit being -- made of earthly materials, and yet having a resonance that communicates on a soul level. Here is the story of making the "Keepers" that exemplifies most this elemental process.

It was January, quite a few years ago -- a time of darkness, slowing down, going inside --and for me that year: depression. I knew I needed to create in order to pull myself out of this numbness.



Luckily I had many small clay heads left over from a holiday project. With those small faces of love, whimsy and wisdom calling me, I gathered fabrics from worn clothing, sticks, thread, beads. I began. The clay head attached to stick/spine/strength -- wrapped in fabric fragments, layered comfort and protection. The thread

stitch, like suture, making mark, making secure. Glass beads added precious color. Bundle/wrap/stitch/bundle/wrap/stitch/bundle/wrap/stitch... Each part of the process felt essential, like a ritual. I made 40 of them, and at last regained my balance!

"Keepers"
finders/keepers
finding something
to hold on to
keep fear at bay
keep faith
keep remembering purpose



These spirit dolls embodied that inexhaustible life force, as one by one I let them go. They were held, chosen, given to those who understood, who needed them.

Over the years, I have continued to create "Keepers" -- from a more joyful place, a little larger, more colorful -- with the same intention - - to deeply touch and transform.

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I've been making spirit dolls for more than thirty years, perhaps one of the first intentional ones being a small wrapped figure that I made for my young friend, Michelle, who was heading to Australia for a year as an exchange student. It was a pocket doll, made for her to carry as a reminder of who she was and to reassure her that she was never alone. Over the years since then I've made many Spirit Dolls, though I've never before articulated just what that term means to me. But oh, how I love a good question! They are opportunities to think deeply about beliefs, actions and motivations. Thank you, Barbara, for the question.

To me, Spirit Dolls are prayers, or, to phrase it differently, are conversations with the Sacred Energy that permeates our universe. They are collaborations between that Creative Energy and the creative energy that dwells within me. Spirit Dolls belong to no specific creed or vocabulary. Each maker or recipient of a Spirit Doll brings her own vocabulary to the process and to its meaning.

Just like with traditional prayers, a Spirit Doll can be made as a meditation, a celebration, a reminder, a plea, an everyday connection, an expression of emotion, belief, thanks-giving or intention. I know that I'm making a Spirit Doll when my ego lets go of perfectionism and the disabling fear of failure that is the hobgoblin of artists everywhere, at least with this one! I know that I'm making a Spirit Doll when I become body, mind and soul immersed in the intuitive process of joyful creation. I know that I'm making a Spirit Doll when I implicitly trust my inner muse rather than the imagined art critic or viewer of the finished piece. These creations speak to me almost as if they were sentient beings, though I know they are not. I don't believe that we are making vessels through which spirit entities speak. Even so, there is a creative energy within them that is palpable. To me, this energy is evidence of the collaborative process between the Sacred and me. What makes me laugh with delight is that it really only matters if I feel it. That is enough. Once again, like with prayer, the doing of it is what matters. But the paradox is that if I feel it, then chances are that someone else will as well.

When I am really absorbed in the process of sacred creation, each pinch and push of the clay, each stitch or wrap of fabric, each choice of color or texture or symbol, is made as if in a dream. Like with meditation, when I'm in this sacred space, time disappears, as do hunger and thirst and my surroundings. Well, maybe the hunger doesn't disappear! But it is like I've entered a liminal space where there is a heightened awareness of now, of this moment. All that exists is what I'm doing right here, right now.

The form of a Spirit Doll varies depending on the intention of the maker, though there are some characteristics that allow the viewer to more easily "read" a doll as a Spirit Doll. These characteristics might be a lack of realism, closed eyes, or perhaps no face at all, elimination of arms or legs, surface design rather than structured clothing and the addition of symbolic elements.



Yet a Spirit Doll doesn't have to have any of these characteristics. What is critical, to me, at least, is that it needs to be infused with a sense of wonder, with mystery. And how do I recognize that? Usually I'll know that it is a Spirit Doll because it elicits a response that feels deeper than just an appreciation of it as a play thing, an object of beauty or a skillful rendering of the materials. It draws me in somewhat the way that a beautiful sunset or a majestic tree makes me pause and breathe more slowly, more deeply. There is a stoppage of time, maybe for just a moment, but enough for me to know that this creation defies time, that it is more than just the assemblage of its materials.

I don't have just one style in which I make Spirit Dolls. Some are quite realistic, as are the figures in my Story Box, Whistling Through the Cracks. Others are more symbolic, as in the small masked pendants which are made with polymer clay, foil, alcohol inks and acrylic paint.

A few, illustrated by the mixed-media piece, *Never Alone*, are reminders that I myself am part of the Sacred Mystery. What will I create next? I don't know, but I do know that each of us can use our creativity to have a conversation not only with ourselves, but also with the Sacred, by whatever name that we call it.

Photo: Story Box: Whistling Through the Cracks (violin case, polymer clay, Apoxie Sculpt, foil, Acrylic paint, wire) Masked Pendants (polymer clay, foil, alcohol inks, acrylic paint, cording)

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Geralyn Sorenson - Spirit Dolls



Doll Making thoughts

When I met Barb Kobe and her dolls, I was amazed and totally drawn to them. I began taking classes in her studio once a week in 2006 and have been creating Spirit dolls ever since. Creating with a small group of wise women has been life changing. We share our journeys and stories as we create. We inspire one another and offer insights into each other's work. We laugh, cry, share, grow. Barb is the catalyst gently encouraging us on our creative journey.

Making Spirit dolls takes me to a much deeper level than I've experienced before. It is cathartic. The Spirit dolls represent aspects of my journey. Each one magnifies an emotion or an attribute I want to embrace or honor or work with, in myself, or others. I have hidden words or messages within their bodies.

Although I find the dolls beautiful in their own way, I have had to learn to deal with the emotions that arise when others don't. Spirit dolls evoke raw feelings, be they positive or negative. People either get them or they don't ("Those are scary! I don't get them.

I appreciate the work you put into them but can't say they are beautiful. Not sure what to say. I don't understand."). It has been a good process for me in trusting my own gifts and my right to express them in a unique way. The only critic who matters is me. I am the midwife and help the dolls through their "birth".

Like an expectant parent before the advent of ultrasounds, I wait to see who emerges. What is its energy? What is its message? What does it heal? Each doll guides me deeper into whatever I am. I suppose one never really knows oneself fully. Making Spirit dolls is a pathway to my inner self and sometimes higher self.



When I sit with the dolls long enough, they give me their names. Sometimes life moves too fast and it may take a year or more. Some bring comfort. Some challenge. Some bring discomfort. Some wisdom. Some bring incredible beauty both inner and outer. It is a blessing to co-create with "Spirit" and to share them with others.

I am a musician and facilitate an experience called WomanHeartSong®, connecting women at the heart through music, movement and conversation. My dolls have been incorporated into many workshops, and I have led women in making simple dolls as a part of them. It is humbling to watch others create their dolls with each one as unique as they are.

My thanks to Barb Kobe, Maureen Carlson, and the women at their art studios for inspiring my journey in doll making.

Shekinah – She Who Gathers

Shekinah was my first Spirit Doll. Although I didn't fully realize it during the process, she was about my mother and I. I was born on mom's birth day. We had identical hands and singing voices. She was one of my best friends but as with any mother and daughter, we had issues, as well. Especially once I grew into who I really was. As a younger woman I really couldn't separate myself from her...especially when I heard "You are just like your mom."



Shekinah's colors were my mom's favorites- rose and mint green. She was full-bodied like Mom and I. I knotted her spine to make it stronger than Mom's or mine and grounded her with stones from Lake Superior. One hand wanted to reach out to others.

One hand hovered over her heart. Her look was one of compassion. I struggled with why her head was so much smaller than her body. I tried to compensate with more yarn hair and a crown of stones. Still, without her shawl her body was huge. I wrestled with it all and searched for understanding.

A search on the name Shekinah, which came to me from a song by that name, revealed multiple meanings which also spoke to me: feminine aspect of God, resting place, divine presence, dove, and others. When I look upon her I see a nurturing, compassionate, full bodied woman who blesses and gathers others to her. She encourages others to pitch their tent, rest with her, be blessed, acknowledged and nurtured. She reaches out but also reaches within. In doing so, she nurtures herself and me..and honors mom and I in our sameness. We are blessed.

Taliah

My second Spirit doll was quite a surprise. As her face emerged she definitely was a woman of color...at first I wondered Asian or Native American but as she evolved she became Mayan.



She remained barefoot with extra large feet to ground her. Her arms were reaching up to Spirit to receive strength and power. She sat on a drum and also had one to play in front of her.... recognizing the power of music, rhythm, and vibration as healing modalities.



Her hair was black wool and she wore strong feathers in her headdress..black, white, many shades of brown, and blue/black/green carrying the colors of the earth. Her shirt had Mayan symbols and her medicine bag had a Mayan design and contained shells, stones and secret healing items.

How does a woman born and raised in Iowa midwife a Mayan Medicine Woman Spirit doll into being; one with a posture of power and strength and clarity??? Who knew she was inside waiting to be born?



As I lead WomanHeartSong© events (connecting women at the heart through conversation, music and movement) I often take Taliah along, hold her to my heart with her drum and let her “play and dance” with the other wise women. I see her strength mirrored in their faces as they interact with her. We honor her as she honor’s us on the journey. Ho !

Geralyn Sorenson
Coon Rapids, MN



Grief Doll



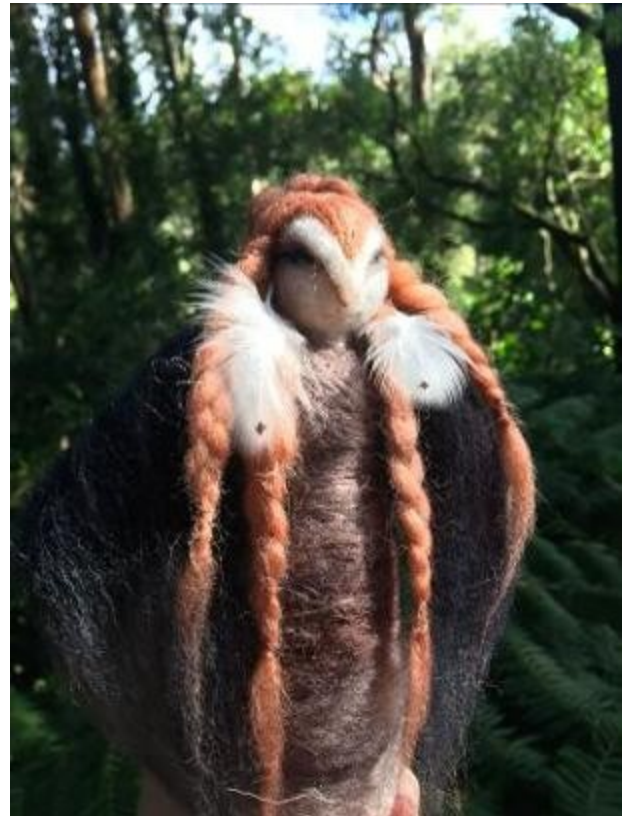


The spirit doll is an ancient being, familiar and beloved to many cultures around the world. And the craft of doll making is part of our heritage as women our healing folklore. We remember making dolls and receiving dolls as spirit companions, as guides and guardians to watch over us, and as vessels to focus on and hold we are in need of deep healing.

Making a spirit doll is engaging in the art of healing and enchantment – to weave life and love into a creation by making something solely by hand with materials from nature. By engaging in these ancestral crafts we weave a bridge back to our own great grandmothers who I believe send blessings to us and to the doll herself before she travels on to do her work with those who need her. I am passionate about embracing and honouring these crafts of our grandmothers that have been forgotten or worse still, been very misunderstood.

I believe my grandmothers brought this craft back to me so that I could live in the forest away from the city and continue to do healing work with people without carrying the heaviness of

The doll came to me in a dream 13 years before but it wasn't until I moved to the forest 4 years ago that I sat with a friend one day to be shown how to needle felt a doll. Something huge unlocked inside me that day and within hours I was creating dolls non-stop. It was as if my hands remembered this craft so well and were so happy! I could feel my grandmothers guiding and teaching me about fleece and fibre, how to include plants that assisted healing and where to find them in the forest.



As the years went on I was creating a doll every day. And I began to notice a new theme turning up in my work with the spirit doll. Not only was I focusing on the person who I was creating for, I began to become aware of the stories of forgotten women and children in history and environments that were carrying the memory of traumatic events that took place there. I began to create dolls for the living and the dead. The strongest stories for me were of the women and children incarcerated within the Magdalene



Laundries and I began by creating and leaving a doll at the old site of the laundry near my home in Melbourne, Australia to be a comfort for the spirits who may still be feeling pain there. I travelled to Ireland and left a doll for the women of the Magdalene Laundry in Dublin. I then met with survivors and created dolls for the living too. I have been called to create and leave dolls at the sites of persecution of women as healers and witches in Scotland and to gift dolls to a pauper's graveyard in London known as the Cross Bones Graveyard.

The balance of dolls for the living and the dead seems to be the way that I give back for my spiritual inheritance. Another way is to leave dolls in nature, in the forest - sometimes as gifts to the trees and sometimes with a note to let people know that if they find this doll she is theirs - she is a free gift to them. Sometimes when people find the dolls in nature they ring me and ask if they can really keep her? I assure them that she is for them and they can't believe

of the doll. Whenever I feel lacking or worried I will create one of these 'free' dolls and give her away and not long after I am aware of the lightening of my own load and strange, beautiful gifts turning up for me too. it - but this teaching and lesson of giving for nothing is a very important part of the teaching You see something very magical happens for the doll maker. In the act of creating a spirit doll for another, we can't help but travel down that rabbit-hole like Alice in Wonderland - we cannot help but dive into the depths of our own heart. I believe that this is an important process in making spirit dolls, we also get to 'make' and heal ourselves. A kind of 'collective shadow work'. You cannot help but go inward with hand made work, there are long long hours and much repetitive movement. Like our grandmothers many moons ago caught up in the repetition of a needle going into thread, or a spinning wheel forever turning, we begin to enter a kind of dreaming-awake state. In the act of making slowly and by hand, you begin to step into a liminal space between time and hear the voice of your own spirit – the dreamer within the dream.

The spirit doll can be a mirror or a bridge to a powerful part of yourself that you might not be able to express. She is a friend and the more time you spend with this friend the more you love them. Perhaps you begin to tell the doll secrets that you hold in your heart and cannot share with others. The doll lives with you daily - through good times and bad - the doll is always accepting. And then a funny thing happens, you begin to feel the living spirit in this doll and how much love it has for you. You then recognise this love as part of your own spirit and that love for the doll begins to flow back from her to you. You see that you are also a magical, beautiful and creative being. You begin to heal yourself.

Julia Inglis
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Barbara Bend



Creative thinking feeds on play.

Play tickles our creative energy

making it laugh out loud

Guffawing an idea to surface.

My art is a spiritual dialogue between my inner self and outer influences. I am compelled to respond artistically to the events that trigger the need to explore, or understand, or celebrate and appreciate at a deep and personal level. The materials I use guide me; they are societal leftovers which I serendipitously unearth or obtain. These materials have their own voice and purpose, whether it be utilitarian in nature or culturally generated. I do not start with a blank canvas or lump of clay, I start with things that have their own integrity, their own history, and place in the world. My work is responsive. I mix materials that bring different perspective and histories together, creating a new purpose and a story that begins to respond to my artistic needs.

I have always been intrigued by the story and design of simple things, especially multiples of common or discarded items, ordinary objects that might pass through our fingers many times, often unnoticed. I look to their intrinsic value, playing with them creating patterns, forming rhythmic motifs. Then search through my materials for beautiful fabrics to integrate with this pattern of common items. I am drawn those that have their own integrity and voice which is woven through their fiber content, color, design and cultural

influence. Once a fabric is found I playfully experiment with these material concoctions and then set them aside to wait until they find their place and purpose in a piece.

Some examples of these integrations are:

- bright South American fabrics with colorful wrapped telephone wire or beaded spirals from notebooks
- zipper pulls or snaps woven into a mesh-like material that may echo the geometric texture of another fabric
- wrapped wire following the seams that connects two different fabrics then branching out in a design that reflects the pattern of the textile

Archetypal shapes are spiritual connectors, their energy bypasses our intellect, connecting directly within our genetic coding. I am drawn to the power of the arch, spiral, and circle all of which have their ancient roots. I strive to create movement, gestures, and energy in my work, while still utilizing structurally sound shapes. The armature of my sculptural forms are welded metal, heavy fencing or electrical wire. The initial forms are often simple archetypal shapes. The shapes are built up and added to by tightly wrapping strips of knit fabric, creating a solid form, and adding finer wire armatures for details. The result is a firm, self supporting, structure that can withstand the weight of the materials I choose to use. This structure allows my forms to flare out with movement to express the spirit of life and energy of emotions.





The Healing Power of Time was inspired by a recovering addict's healing story, an arch welded onto an oval, and a bag of broken watch bands. I met this artist at an art fair and we shared stories that informed and inspired our own work. She talked about her recovery and struggles with addiction and how her poetry supported her sobriety. She shared an experience about an emotional and spiritual breakthrough while walking in the Colorado mountains. She was overcome with hopelessness and in desperation retreated into a cave-like overhang. There she withdrew from her surroundings and retreated deep within herself to calm her angst and recover her emotional balance. A vision of a turtle shell enveloped her and gave her the strength to move forward under the protection of this spiritual force. The turtle had become her totem and had given her strength to move forward in her sobriety and help heal the emptiness that her addiction had left within her.

After I heard the story I knew the welded arch that was lying in my studio, unused, was going to be her shelter. Unsure as to how to depict the spiritual turtle energy she felt, I searched my studio. It was the bag of broken watchbands that spoke to the shell of a turtle.

I began to play, exploring their potential, and connecting them to a screen creating an arch like design that became the inverted turtle shell. I ran out of watchbands so finished the internal arch with a beautiful brass zipper shoulder wrap that I had previously made, which was too heavy and not easy to wear. The arch supported a nurturing face of Mother Earth who offered shelter and supporting hands. Turtle Spirit offered the power to move forward. The inverted shell design is a spiral moving inward and then outward, giving strength to move forward.

Where does spirit live in this artistic process? Spirit is fluid like water or air; it has its own energy, rhythm, dynamics, physics; it thrives in play, quiet places, dark places; it is a place that few words can touch. Artists connect to others through the discipline of returning to work again and again, sometimes full of new ideas but most often empty handed, knowing that practice and discipline keep the creative spirit alive. As artists, we tap into the intangible spirit place for inspiration, and ruminate in an often dark inner place where ideas are born and grow. From there, something may emerge, becoming art, reaching the physical, and connecting to those around us.

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Sharon Riley - Healing Voices Dolls



Nourished by a deep and sacred connection to the Divine in all things, I draw upon the stories, rituals, tradition and mythologies of all cultures and traditions as points of reference for the Healing Voices Dolls. These stories and mythologies speak to me of our origin, of how together we form an intricate network, a tapestry of which

we are all apart. My intention is to imprint these Healing Voices with the harmonic resonance of sound and sacred geometry, the metaphysical information of stones, crystals and other gifts from the Earth.

For me a Healing Spirit Doll is a tangible reflection of the spirit of creation itself revealing in all things. Both personal and Universal, for it seems you cannot separate one without impacting the other. Each is irrevocably intertwined. The doll in concert with its maker ~ through metaphor, intention and the various elements used in its creation become a vehicle through which healing energies flow.

Sometimes the spirit doll is a personal response to a life experience or change of events which may have impacted us at a core level. The spirit doll is the vessel through which we discover lost, often deeply hidden and highly protected aspects of ourselves. The physical act of creating the Spirit Doll gives voice to the healing process.

Often it feels like the voice of the Mystery of All That Is whispering in dreams, prayer and meditation ~ a calling where we are asked to be the vehicle through which Divine Healing can flow into the spirit doll thereby impacting the greater good of all. It becomes a more widely impacting instrument of healing not only for ourselves but for entire Earth. This makes sense to me as everything can be translated to energy.



Copacatchi Dream Spinner



The Guardian and the Dragon are the first of three stewards representing and supporting the element of 'Water'.

The waters of our planet and the waters within ourselves have undergone tremendous stress and pollution over time. It seems acts of outrageous commitment and effort on our parts are required to restore and harmonize the impact to our planet and her myriad life forms. There is a sacred calling to commit to the work of cleaning, clearing and healing the life blood of ourselves and our planet to restore life and balance.



Earth Keepers

Each carries a different instrument, a Drum, a Harp, a Flute. Together they form a collective named “the Holographic Sound Keepers”. Their single and combined tones play new harmonics into Earth’s Hologram and all life sustained by her ~ tones of clearing, healing and renewal. They assist in the release of trauma, pain and memory that no longer serves our greatest good ~ that of self and of the entire planet, thereby facilitating a deep and abiding love for the Earth and all her life forms ~ a beautiful transformation.



Air Keepers

They are custodians of activation codes and emissaries for transformation. This is accomplished through revealing and returning lost “life giving” information to all Earth’s life forms of which we humans are a part. They are responsible for re-encrypting love, light, healing and rebirth into the very consciousness of Mother Earth. One holds an ancient scroll, one a key and a staff, one a shield that represents the constellation Andromeda. Each of these artifacts carry original healing ~ transformational codes from the beginning of time. They help the Earth, and all of us to remember our relationship with all life sustained here and love it back into wholeness.

<http://joyfulnessence.weebly.com/blog/sharon-riley-whisper-of-spiritcom>

Sandy Wythawai Starbird - Spirit Dolls



I have been creating fabric "dolls" for almost 30 years. My work is continually inspired by something that needs to be said -- needs a physical manifestation -- speaks something someone else needs to hear (even and especially if, we have never met and possibly never will). I think the images are always telling the Truth. My input is the skill of my hands and the desire of my heart to listen carefully and translate that Truth in the forms you see. To have an invitation into that creative space, (some artists call it "the zone") where all the possibilities exist and are given an opportunity to work with the ones that speak to you, is certainly a blessing.



"Mongolian Shaman"

Sandy's Making of Her Five Spirit Dolls

I was exploring an old box of accumulated bits and pieces and discovered the bowl of a small wood pipe and realized that the stem resembled a kachina mask with a blowing mouth. I cut the bowl in half and found that I had really made two masks, one expressing outward and the other inward. As I gathered fabrics to use with these two masks, I found a cache of hand-dyed and Devoré (cut out) translucent fabric scraps created by my good friend Melissa Arnold. I decided to patchwork them into whole cloth creating many layers of secrets hidden and revealed. I chose a body form that suggests a dialogue between energy that is not personified as human, but is willing to take on an acceptable shape to enable that dialogue.

When the pair was finished (right to left in the photo) I read them to be representing:

1. Masculine Shamanic Energy- showing inter-dimensional knowing as an outward human experience.
2. Feminine Shamanic Energy- showing inter-dimensional knowing as an inwardly expressed human experience.

These energies can be expressed by both men and women. There remained an interesting pile of scraps, so I made a third figure and this one became:

3. Traveling Between Worlds- the balance point and bridge between what was and what is coming into being.

Still more lovely fabric, so I made a collage of these translucent pieces adding a painted full moon image between the layers and made a fourth image:

4. Full Moon- a balancing act between human and divine, discovering new ways to see reality and acting on self-sourced wisdom.

With just a few tempting pieces left, I made one last collage- now much less complicated that became a fifth image:

5. Dark Moon- contacting inner wisdom, a chance to be renewed, to experience unknowing. Letting go of things completely.

I learned that long ago we stopped using the term Dark Moon and substituted New Moon instead, but there are 2-3 days before the New Moon appears. It felt like we had been avoiding the experience of unknowing and letting go. Now would be a good time to start again. Let's see what has been waiting for us to wake up from this deep sleep.



Kathrine Hall - Spirit Dolls



I look around my living room at no less than 21 sets of eyes which gaze back at me from all of the nooks and crannies and I wonder, who here would be called a spirit doll? Would anyone not be? Is there anyone without a "soul?" Anyone lacking

"spirit?" I pause with each and lock eyes; remembering as the sticks, wire, fabric, clay and I partnered to create these unique beings who share my home. Some were created with a particular intention but each also managed to surprise me, directing and demanding certain colors or embellishments that I would not have thought of.



The spirit of the New Moon, for example, is infused with my directed idea of new beginnings and holiness. Her cool blues and gauzy grays cover an under-layer where these words and intentions are forever imprinted into her body. Even if, over time, I should forget, the spirit remains. She, however, is the one who asked for copper stars, brass moons and beaded hair. I'd had a different plan in mind.

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The funny green Frog Pond Princess embodies a favorite childhood memory of my best friend and I on our bellies, scooting out on muddy logs in attempt to catch the big bullfrogs which shared a pond and pasture with her horses. She echoes our laughter and protects our young innocence for all time.



Tallula, with her extra wide hips and rounded belly is a fertile fountain of creativity. She stands looking skyward, orange Mohawk flowing, jewels glistening, laughing with abandon and reminding me to be fearless in pursuit of creative challenges.



I respond to that. Neith, the large bee goddess, converses with Tierra, the Earth woman; sharing a shrine in honor of the environment. Stones from my sacred place, candles and other trinkets serve to magnify their already potent energy.



Rue, created to help me process grief over the death of my nephew holds all of that emotion which flowed from my heart through fingers into clay to offer me respite and comfort. I am



My original family of Medicine Dolls, made under the encouragement and guidance of Barb Kobe, cluster together in their own niche.

Their collective wisdom wafts through the rooms of my home as they keep watch, each holding space for guardianship, honesty, healing, love, and transformation. There are others, created perhaps, with less intention at the outset, but none-the-less developing meaning in the process or later, whispering little messages including, "I am here for joy!" or "don't take yourself so seriously" or "I'm hopping the first train to Las Vegas - I'm a star! - you be all you can be too!"

I don't pretend to fully understand how this all happens; I only recognize that it does. It's not that these dolls are magical spirits, in and of themselves. There is no voodoo or hoodoo, yet the process is not without a certain sense of magic and mystery. An essence of myself is transferred and I experience an inevitable transformation in the making. The spirit or energy of that change is lodged among the folds and the bones somehow as well as in my own heart. I believe it's fair to call it "spirit." Perhaps what surprises me most of all is that I'm not the only one who can see it or hear them. They sometimes "speak" to sensitive others as well. More than one person has been transfixed and captured by a steady gaze. More than one has gasped, "she has a soul!"