

How-To



The Shoulder Dolls of Kayta Barrows *Marjorie Wilser*

A close friend of costumer and doll maker Kayta Barrows reveals a newly discovered pattern for one of Kayta's shoulder dolls, and provides instructions for making your own.

Kayta Barrows was my flea market buddy, extra fitting hands, and friend extraordinaire. We spent many hours costuming, fitting, sewing, and crafting. Until Kayta developed her shoulder-sitting doll, I had not much experience in constructing small figures, but hers made me want to make my own.

Her first shoulder sitter, the blue calico fairy (right), was a revelation to me. Kayta had designed her to sit comfortably on her shoulder, held mostly by gravity and a strategic safety pin from beneath. We had a great time plotting how I would help her market them in my current tourist town. Alas, she went on to other interests before our plan was developed.

Kayta's ability to envision a three-dimensional form and transform it into a cartoon of reality made her shoulder dolls a

treat. Each was a caricature in miniature, poised for flights of imagination.

When going through some of Kayta's fabric stash after her untimely death, I found the piece parts of one of the shoulder dolls. Delighted, I took them home to play with.

Kayta's patterns were drawn from her initial attempts. She was primarily a creator; patterns came after the fact. So the pattern accompanying this article [see Author Note] is her beta pattern, as developed digitally by Bill Richard from her actual sketch.



Kayta's developmental doll, iteration 1. Blue Fairy.

My experience in creating the Pastel Fairy (sans wings) was interesting. After cutting out and constructing the individual parts (head, separate from body; body; and limbs), I stuffed them, packing in the fiberfill with a chopstick. While constructing the body I left about 1.5" open on a back seam, stuffed it, and hand-sewed it shut.

The only way possible to attach the head and limbs was to turn an edge of the cloth over and "invisibly" stitch each in place on the body. This enables placement of



Back of Blue Fairy (wings cut from preprinted cloth).



Kayta's original and one she cut later, made by me.

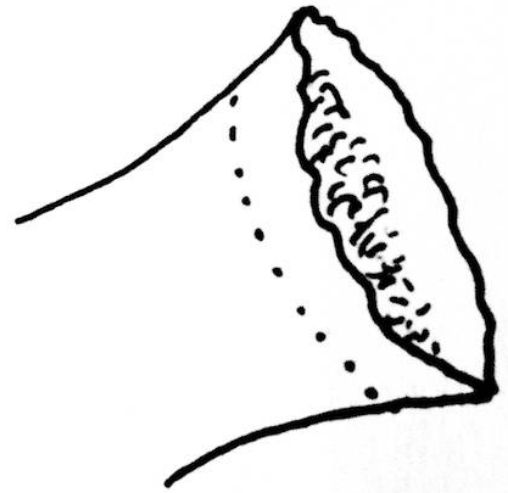


Kayta's scrap bag fairy, made by Marjorie Wilser.

the limbs in realistic positions. Kayta's directions include her suggestions about placement.

I found that the doll which was cut out turned out to be much thinner than her original design, the blue calico fairy. I sewed her as cut. The photo of them together (left) shows the comparative sizes. I stuffed my doll more tightly than Kayta did, so there is a range of stuffedness according to your personal preference.

Kayta was a wizard at character portrayals for her dolls, as you can tell by the photos I took of them in 2002. My personal favorite is her Renaissance Faire babe kicking back in a chair, Fair accoutrements dangling from her waist, socks visible, at the end of a long day at the



Above: End view of stuffed limb-- stuffed to line, seam allowance showing above. Turn, and stitch invisibly per Kayta instructions. Below: Leg attachment position and "invisible" stitching to body at hip. Drawings copyright Marjorie Wilser, 2012.



View of scrap bag fairy, showing leg attachment.





RenBabe tucked out from working at the beer booth



Embroiderer is having some issues just now. Needle waving midair, she clutches at the collar she's been embroidering and dangles breathlessly by one hand.

Faire (left). A Kayta blouse (below and right) shows her sense of humor. The dolls are continuing the embroidery she started to finish the blouse. What costumer hasn't had the nightmare of the gremlins helping out?

Kayta always intended for this design to be a beginning: a platform from which dollish wonders would spring at the hands of their creators. May they go forth and elicit more wonders from creative costumers!

Marjorie Wilser's first passions were sewing and reading, so when she developed a fixation on history, costuming was the result. Now working on a fact-based historical novel, she has an MA in US history and an insatiable urge to create. In addition to several needle arts, she makes hatpins, corsets, millinery, and owns several antique printing presses. Boredom is never an issue. She calls herself a woman of many evil hobbies. These include tatting, crochet, knitting, quilting, soapmaking, millinery, printing, genealogy and bookbinding. There aren't enough hours in any day.



Thread Holder is being helpful, perching casually on a blouse shoulder, proffering a thread to her companion.



The hapless Sleeve Sewer has fallen and ripped out the top of the sleeve. She is clutching a purple lifeline.

Author Note

The image on the next page is a pattern for Kayta's doll. Printed on 11" x 17" paper, it is *larger* than actual size. Even so, there was a little clipping. On 8.5" x 11" paper it is smaller than Kayta's original doll. Use any reproduction technique that gives you the scale you need. Suggestion: print out the doll's head and see what size to use from the size it produces. Digital pattern developed by Bill Richard from Kayta's actual sketch.

