

News From the Studios

continued

Barbara Odil

A familiar face at East Coast crafts shows, Barbara Odil counts doll enthusiasts among her many fans—"at least the ones who collect non-traditional dolls," she says with a smile. Unusual and unpredictable, with the mystical aura of a tribal relic or totem, her one-of-a-kind figures pay homage to indigenous cultures from around the world. "Native Americans, the aborigines of Australia and other indigenous peoples strive to live in harmony with the earth. They have a deep reverence for nature, whether it is a tree or an animal. I want to remind people of that," she says.

Called "Primal Spirits," Odil's painstakingly handcrafted figures marry years of artistic pursuits (she studied batik, painting and metalwork at Mercer University and the University of Georgia) with her admiration and respect for indigenous peoples. The dolls are not, however, directly based on any one culture's costumes or traditions. "I don't try to copy ritual costume; that would be sacrilege," the artist asserts. "The interpretation is what comes through in my work."

Odil begins each piece with a graceful body, which she usually shapes out of black bamboo. She then creates the figure's costume using a variety of natural materials such as feathers, raffia and shells. Next, the artist sculpts the face mask. Painting the mask is especially time-consuming. Using fabric dyes ("they give rich, vibrant colors that are somewhat translucent"); she bathes the mask in color, endeavoring to match the hues of the costume. For a final touch, Odil decorates the mask with gemstones, shells and rocks.

Like many artists, Odil discovered the joys of dollmaking in a round-about way. Several months after taking a women's spirituality workshop, she was inspired to sculpt a mask—her first—in clay. Later, when she made a second mask, she decided to make an entire figure to go with it. "Doing the whole figure gave me more of a sense of completion," she notes. "It should be true with any kind of art, but with dollmaking it's especially true: that the artist has the freedom to sit down and let the spirit of each piece shine through." (Barbara Odil, PO Box 23, Watkinsville, GA 30677; 706-546-5601.) ■

Barbara Odil incorporates natural materials into her Primal Spirits—figures that celebrate indigenous cultures. 1) "Ori Ire," 31 inches, has arms made of palm and legs made out of sticks. Her costume includes a palm frond "bodice" and a raffia skirt. Priced at \$725, "Ori Ire" has a richly decorated and expressive face mask. 2) "La Loba," or "wolf woman," has a bamboo body and a sculpted face mask. Her leather costume is embellished with porcupine quills, clamshell beads and glass beads. "La Loba," 34 inches, sold for \$650. 3) Named "Durga" after the East Indian goddess of abundance, this radiant one-of-a-kind figure by Barbara Odil sold for \$825. Like all of Odil's pieces, "Durga," 33 inches, can either be hung on a wall or displayed on a stand.

