

THE STORY OF MY WORK

by
Gail Wilson

I used to think that this work of making dolls began in 1974, when I actually carved and made my first molded dolls. But it goes much farther back than that to a childhood filled with making things and a fascination for my grandmother's extraordinary sense of running a business, which she began in the Depression and ran successfully in a tiny mill town for fifty years. It was with great certainty that at fourteen I proclaimed I wanted to make my living making and selling handcrafts, and inevitable that by sixteen, I cleaned out an old chicken coop, painted it, reglazed the windows, reroofed it, then opened a small shop selling my work and that of two friends. I set off for Skidmore College in 1968 from New Hampshire, determined to fulfill my artistic dream, but also wanting to become sophisticated and never live in New Hampshire again. By my second year good sense had returned and my goal became building my life and livelihood in the country. After college, during which I spent most of my time studying pottery and jewelry, I went to work as a graphic artist hoping to save a nest egg to buy land, maybe in Vermont - my birthplace. After a couple of years of this, there was no nest egg, so I decided to just begin. I chose pottery and felt that I needed a little more technical background, so returned to school to learn more. It was during the summer of 1974, that I made some dolls of a porcelain clay, which I happened to be working with. It never occurred to me to do any research - I like the direct, just-do-it approach, so I never consulted a single reference or previously made doll. What I made was what came out of all the hidden ideas I ever had as a child for what a Perfect doll, if-you-could-have-just-one-doll, would be. And when the first one became whole, I knew then I had found the door to my dreams. It is clear now that the creation of my dolls in this "vacuum" was to be beneficial, keeping the style of my dolls unique from all others.

But I never wanted to be a dollmaker. Instead, what has grown out of my dolls, is that they have become little canvases on which to work out what I have come to feel is my engineering self. I put to work my love of solving problems and feeling that nothing and no medium is an obstacle. I began to work in wood and employed my knowledge of metal, paint and sculpture. One concept that is important to me is that all of my dolls including all of the many accessories I specialize in must be dolls and toys that might have been played with - no doll figures for me, and although my early work for the first decade was created entirely without any references, I now work a lot from historical material in the period of the 1800's. I have participated in many major museum shows and made dolls for those museums and dolls for the movie industry, been featured in many magazines and books and have taught all over the world and now online. And of course the most important part is that I did go live in the country (New Hampshire is after all a wonderful place, and besides, where I live really looks like Vermont), and grow to love early American primitives, old houses, gardening and animals. I work in a studio in my home, where it is sometimes hard to separate the work from the play, because I love it all and it is all the same.

420 Grout Hill Road • South Acworth, NH 03607
www.gailwilsondesigns.com
email@gailwilsondesigns.com