

MAKING POSEABLE DOLLS

The Basics



MAKING POSEABLE DOLLS

Poseable dolls, or art dolls as they're more often called, have had a sudden resurgence in recent years in the hand-made arts industry because of their beautiful and individual nature, and collective value. Artists create and sell art dolls that resemble characters from popular culture, mythological creatures, hyper-realistic celebrities and stand-for poignant messages.

There are many different types of art dolls, the main two being soft-bodied (made using a mixture of soft materials, clay pieces and armatures) and ball-jointed (made entirely of clay with highly moveable joints).

In this workshop we will be looking at making a very basic art doll with a completely soft body and sculpted clay face, but the skills that you will learn by doing this can be applied to more complex and ambitious projects.



ARTIST EXPLORATION

The following artists are all excellent examples of different, but nonetheless successful, approaches to creating art dolls. Their works are very different and may serve as some inspiration for your own creations. Check them out, either with a general online search or on **Pinterest**.

- **Amanda Louise Spayd.**
- **Lisa Toms.**
- **Wendy Froud.**

You could also generally search '**Art Dolls**' or '**Fantasy Dolls**' to get a much wider and diverse range of examples and inspiration.



Pinterest, is a discovery app that features everything from recipes to home improvement, and it is a never ending resource for creatives. It is free to use and can be personalised and tailored to your interests.

CREATING A CHARACTER

You will soon be designing and making your poseable doll, so this is a good point to think about what character you will create.

Get some inspiration from real and mythological creatures, or design something straight from the depths of your imagination. Perhaps you have been inspired by one of the artist you've previously looked at and want to make something with the same essence.

You may decide to make a doll of an existing character from animation, film or tv. If you do this keep in mind that they will probably be quite complex, and you may need to simplify the design down and use it as inspiration only.

EXERCISE: CHARACTER DESIGN

First of all you will need to design your own poseable doll. Keep it basic, and try to design it whilst keeping in mind the materials that you have available to you. **Draw your character to scale.** That means that you should draw it the same size as you want it to be made.

Note: The creation of your art doll will require some sewing, so keep in mind your level of confidence in that area before you create something too ambitious. Stick to wide, chunky limbs (or no limbs if you want!) or you could even create a design that uses an existing “body”, like a sock.

Spend some time in particular focusing on the face that you will be sculpting. Think about proportions, expressions and colour when designing your doll.

EXAMPLE: CHARACTER DESIGN



ARMATURES

An **armature** is a structure, sort of like a skeleton, that sits inside of the doll and allows it to be flexed and posed.

Prefabricated armatures are available at professional grade. Metal skeletons made from steel rods and fine ball joints are more often used in stop-motion animation, but plastic beaded armatures can come in long reels that can be adapted to your requirements. The latter is much more affordable, as professional stop-motion armatures can cost hundreds of pounds.

For this workshop you don't require anything more than a basic makeshift armature, which you can make using **armature (aluminium) wire**. The wire can be fixed together by wrapping it around itself, but you can make stronger joints with **epoxy putty** or **electrical connector blocks**.

See the Armature Example in a couple of pages for visuals.

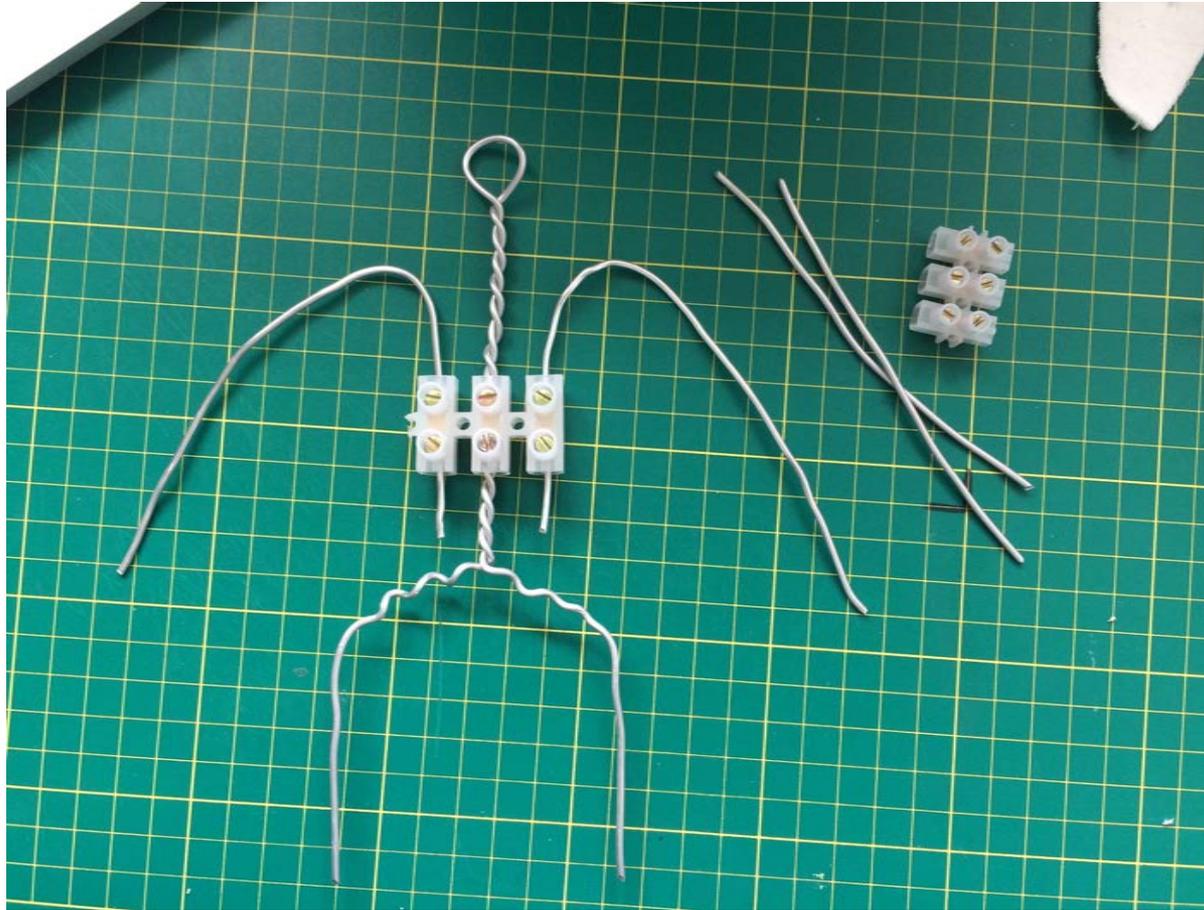
EXERCISE: MAKING AN ARMATURE

You will now design and create an armature that will fit inside your doll and allow it to be moved and posed.

Use your original drawing of your doll to figure out what shape your armature should be and where the pieces (if there are any separate) need to be affixed to one another.

Tip: When using armature wire, (which is usually a soft type of aluminium wire that is very malleable) it is a good idea to add extra strength to it by twisting two strands of it together, as illustrated in the example on the next page. This will stop it from bending out of shape as much, and will also stop it from breaking quickly (as when the wire is bent in the same place constantly it will eventually weaken and snap).

EXAMPLE: MAKING AN ARMATURE



MAKING THE BODY

The body of your doll will be made out of fabric and sewn together (unless you have opted to use something like a sock that is already pre-sewn).

You can use any kind of material, but it should be of a good quality, otherwise the stitches may pull out (you can check if the material will do this by pulling at the edges to see if the material frays and you can pull bits off). You could also do with a material that has some elasticity to it. It doesn't have to be extremely stretchy, as long as it has a little give in it.

Tip: Also remember when you draw your pieces out to draw them slightly larger than you want them to be to account for the outside edge being sewn together. An extra half a centimetre around the outline should be enough.

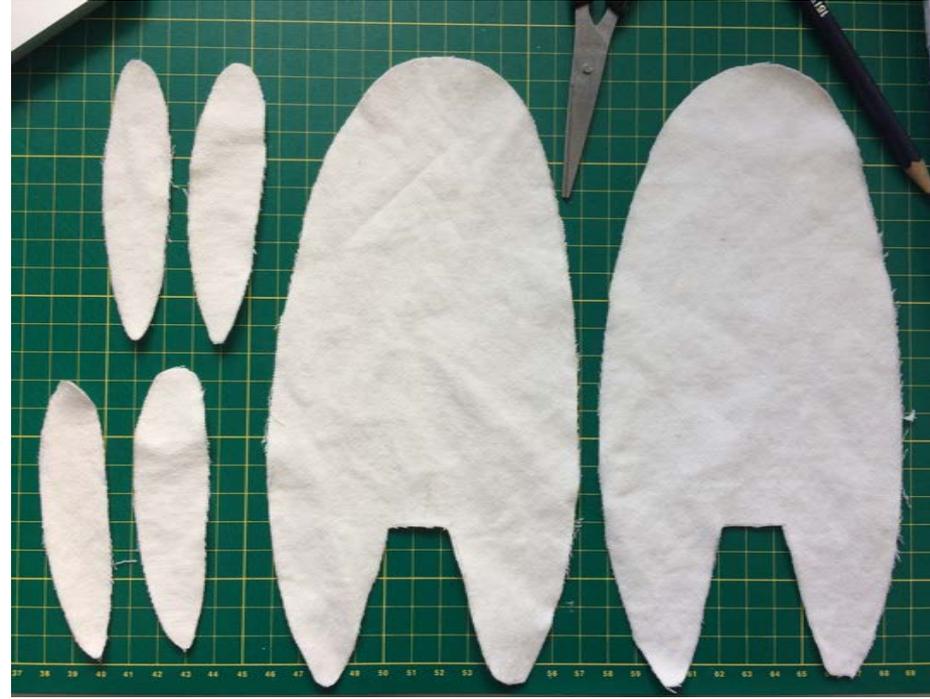
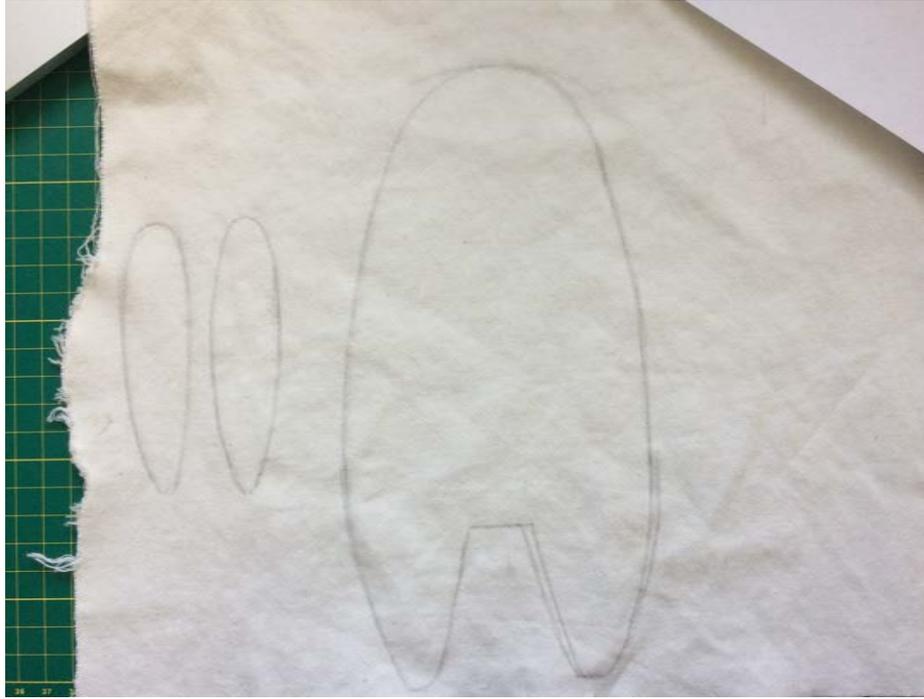
EXERCISE: CREATING THE TEMPLATE

On your chosen material, draw out the pieces that you will sew together to create the body of your doll. Depending on how you want it to be assembled, you may need to draw it in several parts, like the example overleaf.

The body and limbs can be all one piece as long as the limbs aren't too long or thin, in which case it will be easier to make them separately and sew them on after the body is done.

Remember to draw out a front and a back for each piece! You can ensure that they will fit together by first cutting out one piece and then drawing around it to make the second piece.

EXAMPLE: TEMPLATE



EXERCISE: SEWING THE BODY

You will now need to sew the body up. If you are not confident with sewing, the OCA workshop on [Sewing and Embroidery Basics](#) will help you start out.

When you sew your pieces together it is easiest to start out by turning the pieces inside out and sewing half of it first using a standard ladder stitch.

For the time being, only sew up to this point (halfway) as we will be adding in the armature and stuffing next before sewing up the rest.

Turn the doll back the right way (turning it inside out again) before you continue.

EXAMPLE: SEWING THE BODY



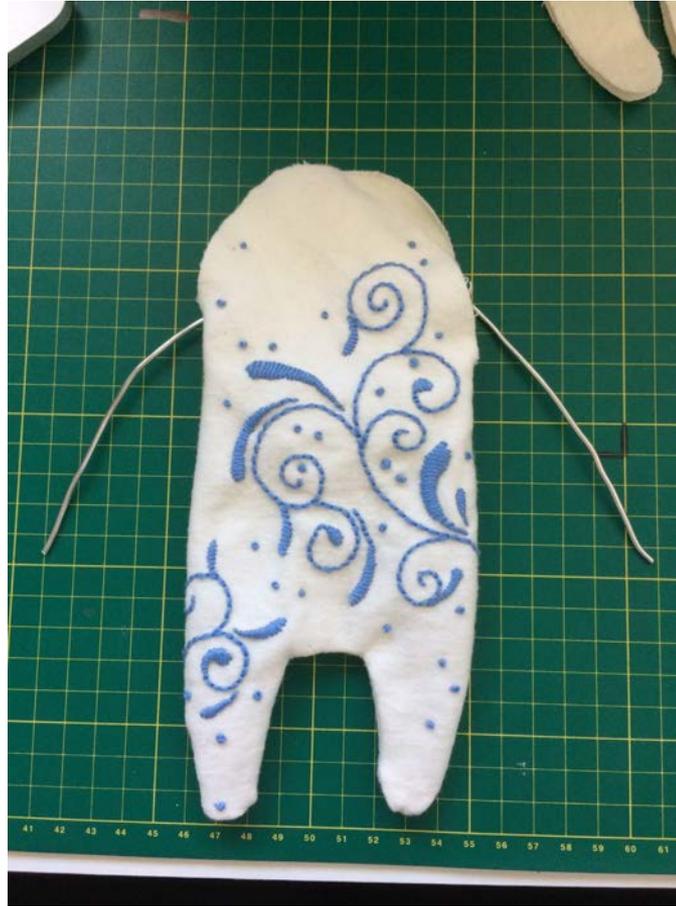
EXERCISE: INSIDE THE DOLL

Insert your armature into your half sewn doll skin, ensuring that it still fits as intended (if it doesn't you can easily trim down any bits of wire).

Now you will need to add in the stuffing. For the purpose of our basic dolls you can stuff it with anything, there's no need to purchase anything unnecessarily. The best stuffing to use for your doll would be cotton wool, as it is cheap, available in rolls, and has use outside of dollmaking.

Add in the stuffing around the armature, ensuring it stays in place inside the doll skin. You will need to add in all of the stuffing to the section that hasn't been sewn up yet as you will be sewing around it in the next exercise.

EXAMPLE: INSIDE THE DOLL



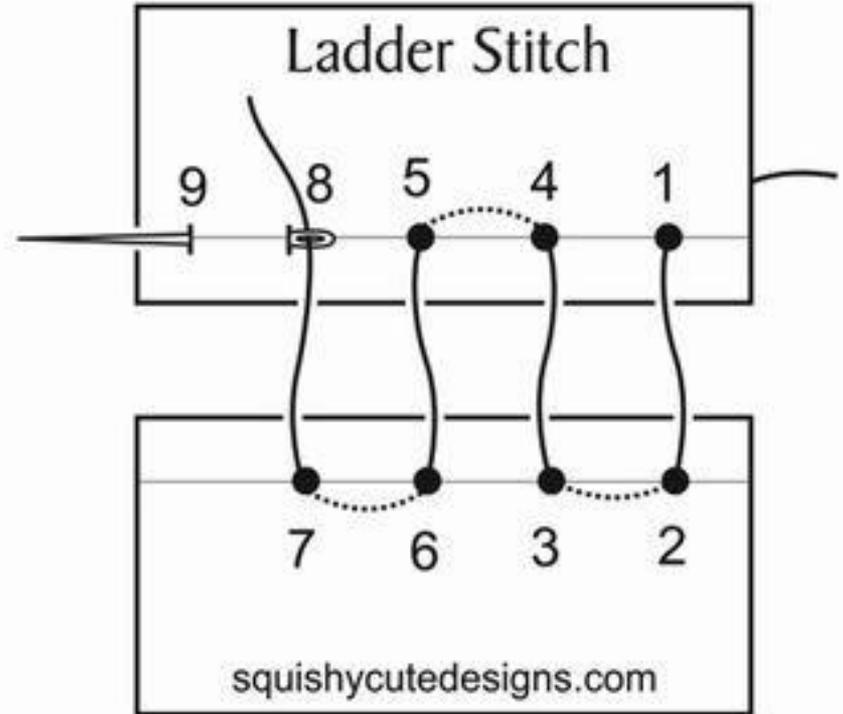
EXERCISE: FINISHING THE SEWING

Now you will need to finish sewing up the rest of your doll.

To finish sewing the body up now that it is no longer inside out you will need to use an invisible stitch or hidden ladder stitch (illustrated).

Don't worry about making it extremely neat and perfect! Just pull your stitches tight to be sure everything stays together.

Keep an eye on your stuffing and keep checking to see if you need to add more before you completely sew it up.



EXAMPLE: FINISHED BODY



EXERCISE: MAKING A FACE

Now you will make the face of your doll.

You need to use either air dry or polymer clay for this, as it needs to be hardening. To learn more about types of clays and sculpting, check out the OCA workshop [Sculpting with Clay](#).

Once your clay is hardened, you can paint it up however you like.

Tip: Remember not to get too hung up on it being perfect, but pay attention to easy fix details that will make it look better. Things like getting proportions right and choosing colours that match the material of the body.

EXAMPLE: MAKING A FACE



EXERCISE: FINISHING FEATURES

When you have the body and face both finished and ready, use a strong glue to attach them together.

Tip: Craft glues and high-tack glues which work on different materials are best for these types of projects.

You may also decide to add more materials, embellishments and features to your doll, such as lace, beads, embroidery or even extra clothing.

Whatever you add, make sure it is affixed appropriately and doesn't restrict the movement of your poseable doll.

EXAMPLE: FINISHING FEATURES



TAKING IT FURTHER...

If you wanted to take your doll making further, here are some ways to branch out.

You can make more clay features for your doll, such as hands, feet and ears. Be sure to think about how the armature will look and how they will fit together, as adding features like these requires them to be attached to the armature.

Try different ways of stuffing and sewing your character. You may have no option but to branch out for more complex and larger dolls. You can buy wadding, which is a bulkier stuffing, in large rolls from fabric stores.





IMAGES COURTESY OF INKYPUNKART

REFLECTIONS

We hope you have enjoyed learning the basics of doll making with us. You can now take what you've learned and develop it further. The only limit is your imagination.

It is important to remember to constantly self-evaluate your work as you go along. Keep practicing and redesigning and learn from any mistakes. It takes a lot of patience, hard work and time to create art dolls, so whatever you create you should be proud of!



The OCA would love to see what you've created. Share your pictures and videos with us by tagging us in them on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.



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