



PRECIOUS MISERIES

NOT YOUR ORDINARY RAG DOLL

By Kat Strauss

When I was first told that I would be doing a piece on a new line of dolls I thought to myself, 'Yeah, dolls! I like dolls!' I had no idea what to expect in the mail but from the moment I opened the package and pulled out the colorful cloth dolls, I haven't been able to put them down since. The first thing I noticed was all the detail, the use of fabrics, the little buttons and findings, the whole deceptively simplistic thing. From the top of her featureless head with big empty eyes to her spider webbed legs adorned with kick ass boots I fell in love with "Lil' Flower Girl" and then, I saw the other doll in the package...

I pulled out a doll with a patchwork face, button eye, done all in micro suede (my favorite!) with a little pet moth on a leash and I was in love with "Lil' Ragdoll" for completely different reasons. She was so sad and discombobulated that you would be a horrible monster to not want to adopt her into your doll family.

Each one comes with a mysterious background that has lead them to be orphans living in Precious Miseries Manor, a 'haunted home' cared for by the even more mysterious benefactress by name of Seven who wants you to take her wounded children and give them the love and devotion they need to remind them how precious they are.

Through some hard work and dedication (I.E. I e-mailed her) I have unlocked the mystery that is Seven. Her name is **Melissa Diaz**, a graduate of Maryland Institute College of Art, who wanted to combine her fashion tastes of the edgy dark side with her love of Anime- thus the dolls were born.

The thing I was most curious about was how she came about designing the dolls. Each one is so unique and her use of design is really quite appealing.

"The first thing I had to do, aside from having the initial character design, was to create turn-arounds for the characters that Hot Topic had chosen. I drew simple 'character sheets' of the character's front, back and side. I had to color code them, using pantone colors, as well as choose fabrics that I envisioned the dolls to be made out of. However, due to our budget and the difficulty in sourcing the fabric in China, my original fabric choices got scrapped. George, Toynami's president, was extremely supportive in my vision of the dolls and was always trying to come up with more ideas to keep the quality up and stay within the budget at the same time. After I sent out my character sheets and fabric swatches to George, he sent me prototypes of the dolls. It was then my job to critique the prototypes and write out specifically how they needed to be changed so they looked more like my original concepts. I think for each doll I have gone through about 4-5 prototypes. I hate to be picky, but I want the dolls to look as close to how I envisioned them on paper as I can get."

I have to keep coming back to the detailing in the dolls. They have such a unique quality to them that I haven't seen in manufactured dolls that I thought perhaps Melissa actually crafted them herself. I was surprised they were being mass-produced.

"Although I do make my own dolls," said Melissa, "I did not have a particular doll pattern or prototype for the factory to use. With Lil' Ragdoll, George and I took extra care to make her seem as vintage as possible, without going over the budget."

They have the look and feel of being hand sewn, actual creations out of love, instead for profit. I'm not saying that other dolls out there aren't just as great. I love the 'fashion dolls' that feature Goth personas, even own a few of them, but there is something so sweet and innocent about Precious Miseries that you can't help but love and want to collect them.

That brings up a valid point. These dolls can't exist without our support. Melissa has put her heart and soul into these dolls and sales are not coming up roses which means Hot Topic could pull them off the shelf which could mean the end of Precious Miseries. That is something I just can't understand. Why are dolls this cute being ignored by the public? Bad Public! There is a Save The Lil' Ragdoll Campaign where you can learn more about spreading the word to gain more interest- at PreciousMiseries.com.

Melissa hasn't stopped with dolls either. She also has a series of plush toys called StiTcheS. "He originally started as an alien, but with the release of Lilo and Stitch and the booming popularity of Invader Zim, I transformed his story into something a bit more Pinocchio-ish. I think the original concept for StiTcheS was very similar to my concept for Precious Miseries. I wanted to create something cute, kind of creepy but extremely simple in design."

As well as creating a plush of StiTcheS she's working on an animation series with Sony to make StiTcheS famous in the cartoon scene.

"There are still many things that I would like to work out in the StiTcheS world. I see the show as being enjoyed by all ages, from children to adults. I am trying to keep the humor witty as opposed to slapstick."

As someone who admittedly is sickly obsessed with Invader Zim, I would love to see another animated cartoon out that has the powers to entertain with innocently dark humor. You can find out more about StiTcheS on the Precious Miseries Web site.

Really, if you collect dolls, these little girls are worth having in your collection. There is a timeless quality to them that you will treasure for years to come and unlike some darkling dolls on the market these are very kid friendly. They'd make a great gift for anyone of any age. ♦

Look for Precious Miseries at your local Hot Topic, online at HotTopic.com or go to PreciousMiseries.com