

MOODY - A TOY STORY

The Moody toy started out as a simple idea that soon got way, way out-of-control. How can a simple doodle turn into a limited production run DIY vinyl toy? Well, I'll tell you. It all started with a simple little pen and ink doodle of a cow/demon that turned into an ink and charcoal drawing and eventually into a primitive sculpt that stood about 5 inches high. The initial sculpt was fashioned out of a few multi-colored Super Sculpey bricks that had found their way into my studio soon after Christmas Day 2005.

The first sculpt, although crude, looked like it might have some potential. When the second sculpt was completed, it definitely looked at home amidst a number of the DIY toys that share my studio space with me. I soon ran afoul when I began to think that I could build a mold and make castings of hundreds of toys. Hmmm, I've always wanted to be a toymaker. I might even be able to get some of my artist friends to use it as a dimensional canvas for their doodles. Perhaps I could find a place that might be willing to do a Moody custom show. Oh, how easy, and cheap, it is to dream. Could Moody become the next hot DIY toy on the market? Hey, I can dream can't I? Yes, the next Tristan Eaton is born! Huge pause as a silly dreamer snaps back into reality.

Although I still had some of my multi-colored Super Sculpey left over after the initial sculpt, I needed to invest in some additional bricks for my next piece. To further complicate things, I thought that articulation would definitely add a whole new dimension to the toy. Articulation was a natural progression, however it was easier said than done, especially for a novice toy designer. After disassembling a number of articulated toys from my collection for ideas, I settled on a very rudimentary peg and hole design. It was far from perfect, but I needed to start somewhere. After weeks of sanding, tooling and tinkering my second sculpt was beginning to look a lot more like a real toy.

After researching molding and casting techniques and getting advice from toy designers and all-round good guys such as Sol-Nte (Figurepunk) from England and Tyson Summers from the U.S., I decided that I would also investigate companies that do this for a living. I contacted a number of North American companies that basically were either too busy or were not interested in small toy projects – especially from an unknown artist. Who and the hell did I think I was anyway? Not to be defeated by rejection after rejection, I continued to pursue my goal and began to contact artists who might be willing to help steer me in the right direction.

Eventually, I came across a couple of talented artists by the names of Erin and Kelly Carty ... a couple of fellow Canadians who had just completed work on their first toy, Twink. Prior to getting in touch with Erin and Kelly, I had purchased one of their amazing little Twink toys for my collection. They provided me with the name of a contact person, Lawrence, who works for a relatively small toy company in Shenzhen, China.

This is where the whole thing really got crazy. Yipes! ... I was now communicating with a person half way around the world, who was assuring me that they would be able to produce 500 of my toys. This was substantially more toys than I needed for my art toy project, however it was the smallest production run they would do. He also assured me that his company had a great team of technicians that could figure out how best to make sure my toy had professionally constructed articulation points. Brilliant stuff! My extremely patient and supportive wife provided me with a gentle nudge and the rest is, while not quite, history. Moody was born after 7 months of sweat, tears and much labor. Created in Canada ... built in China. Ah, success ... one little idea implemented!

The support from the artistic community has been overwhelming to say the least. I have been extremely fortunate to assemble a diverse and talented group of artists from around the world who have graciously agreed to participate in my little art toy project. The 35 Moody group artists come from Russia, China, England, Singapore, Australia, Japan, The Netherlands, United States and, of course, Canada. The artists will each customize a Moody and return them for shows that I am in the process of organizing. The first scheduled appearance of the Moody customs will take place at the Helen Christou Gallery at the University of Lethbridge in November 2007. I am also in the process of organizing other shows that will hopefully take place in advance of the U of L show.

Although my little art toy project has been extremely gratifying, the process was definitely not for the feint of heart. However, if you do have the desire and a pile of spare cash that is burning a hole in your pocket, I can definitely say that it has been one of the most rewarding things I have accomplished as an artist.

Now, if I could only find a home for the Moody army that currently resides in my basement. Forward, march! Hut, two, three, four!

- Ted Stilson