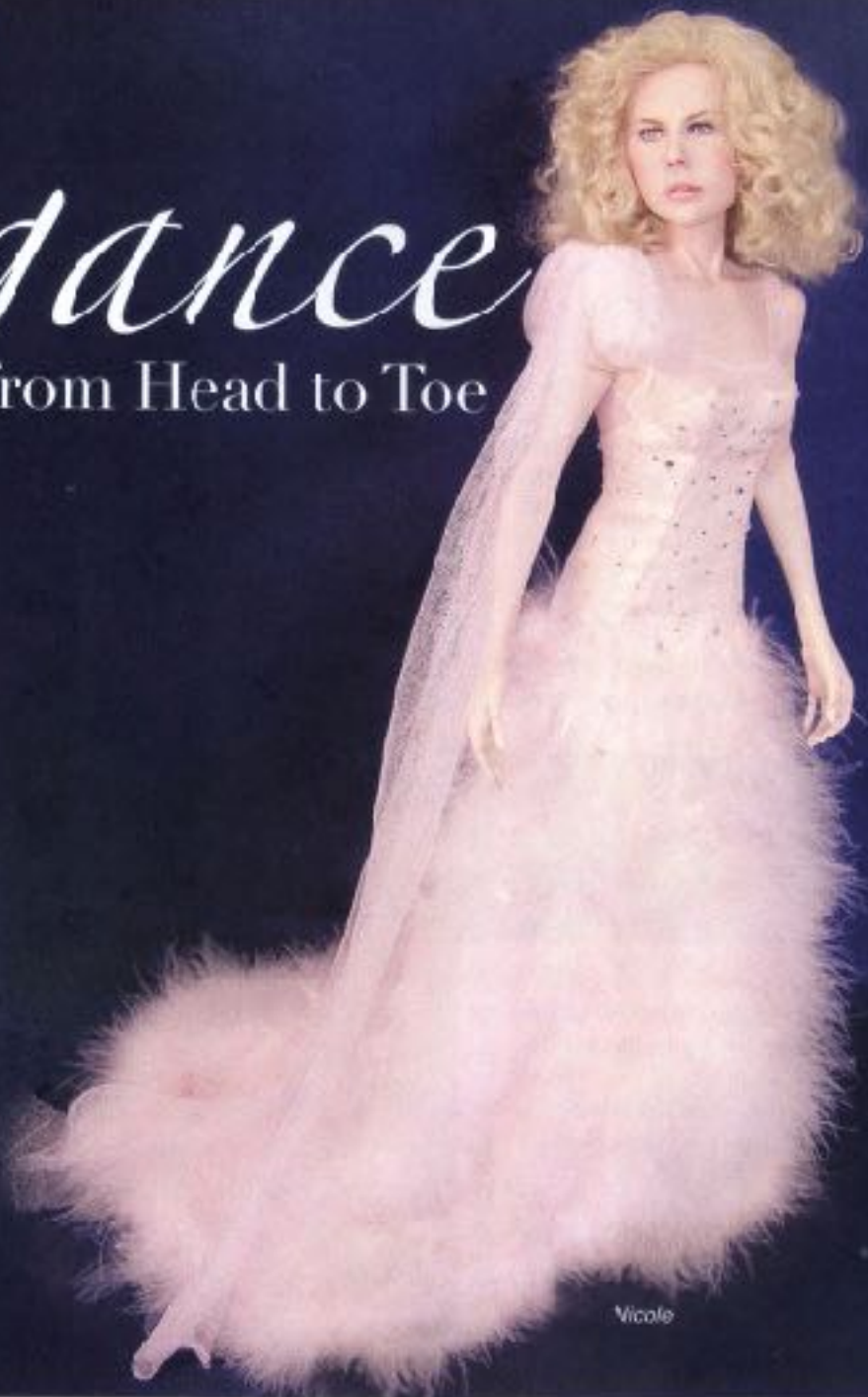


# Elegance

from Head to Toe



For artist Catherine Mather, it is the beauty of porcelain and the painting of expressive faces that captures her heart.

*By Deb Weisler  
Photos by Catherine Mather*

**T**here is something special about coming home from a long trip and gazing fondly upon familiar landscapes. After a successful show amid enthusiastic collectors, it's the shire of Unanderra along Australia's east coast, where the beauty of the sea against a backdrop of bush land conspire, prompting Catherine Mather to create some of the world's most exquisite dolls.

The seeds of creativity were planted in her childhood under the patient tutelage of her mother, with whom she shares a home, imparting a love of sewing. Her skills earned Catherine a certificate of fashion in college where she mastered crafting, millinery, dressmaking, embroidery, and home décor.

"I can't think of one skill learned in those years I haven't needed in the creation of my dolls," Catherine recalls. Her love of creative arts led to a decade creating fancy dress, masquerade, and theatrical costumes, where

Amethyst



Jane



Celo



Penny Skye



Renaissance Skye



she honed her skills in design, costuming, and historical figures. With an occasional giant banana, elephants, and hippos as part of her repertoire, who could have imagined what awaited her around the bend?

In the late 1980s in search of a hobby Catherine found a local studio that taught antique reproduction porcelain doll making. It seemed the ideal venue, allowing her to display her intricate costumes in smaller scale, but it was the beauty of porcelain and the painting of expressive faces that truly captured her heart.

It wasn't long before she had her own kiln and began creating and selling reproduction dolls. "After attending a sculpting class taught by Australian doll artist Marie Massy, I moved to original sculpting and never looked back!"

*Victoria* and *Grace* were the first original dolls Catherine designed from scratch, *Victoria* with a lower cloth body and *Grace* a full clay sculpture at a time when most artist dolls were soft bodied. Dressed in white Edwardian children's outfits complete with lace and tucks, her dolls were unique and infinitely appealing. By the early 1990s Catherine was ready to launch her line in the U.S.

"It can be a bit overwhelming when you put your original work out there for the first time for the public to view," she says. "I was naive about how many orders I would receive and how much interest was generated from that first sculpted doll. Lots of long hours were required to commit to orders, and it was another 12 months before I could sculpt a second doll."

Her love of Art Nouveau, clearly reflected in many of Catherine's dolls, results in exquisite filmy, flowing costumes that envelop and highlight the form and pose of each fully sculpted body. Her period costumes epitomize the glamour of bygone eras—Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Victorian and Edwardian when haute couture reigned.

Draped in silks and fine cotton, French and English lace, with an occasional snippet of vintage fabric for detail, her hand-dyed fabrics lend a color palette that blends seamlessly with hair and skin tones, making her dolls truly breathtaking and instantly recognizable.

Working from photos and life models, Catherine forms her original designs in porcelain clay. With dozens of concepts floating about in her head it can take upwards of

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a year to go from concept to completion. "When I conjure up the image of what I want to create it involves the costume, shoes, wig, jewelry, even the chair. I like to make everything so it can truly be called an artist doll. And because of that I only sculpt three to four dolls each year, and they are made in small editions, each an essence of my vision."

Sharing a workspace with her mother, a miniaturist, also gives Catherine an opportunity to bounce ideas around with another artist. At present she is working on 17- to 18-inch dolls, finding this size most desirable for costuming and display. Prices range from \$1,200 to \$1,600.

Living on the other side of the world limits the number of shows and events exhibiting her work, but with a growing list of delighted collectors and retail stores, Catherine has found that word-of-mouth is one of her best selling points. When possible, IDEX and NIADA events allow her to meet collectors and merchants, and magazine advertising and the Internet carries her work around the world. "I don't think the novelty of receiving e-mails from New York, Moscow, or Barcelona will ever stop amazing me," Catherine laughs.

"Some people spend their whole life looking for what makes them happy. I found my passion and it is creating dolls; not just the sculpture but the whole doll. That's the real satisfaction of being an artist." What's next for Catherine? Her mother has begged her for years to try her hand at 1:12 scale dolls. Recently inspired by other miniaturists hinting the same, Catherine may just take her work in a whole new direction. *DR*



For more, visit Catherine Mather's Web site at [catherinematherdolls.com](http://catherinematherdolls.com).



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