

PIDGIN DOLLS

The ethereal art of Joshua McKenney comes through in 3-D with his elegant line of porcelain ladies

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSHUA MCKENNEY



*P*idgin is a modern take on the classic European fashion doll. Each element of Pidgin is painstakingly designed and handcrafted, from the heirloom-quality porcelain to the custom wigs and garments. Her look embodies Brooklyn street-style, Manhattan sophistication, and the classic lines of yesterday. Pidgin represents a new chapter in the venerable tradition of boutique doll making.

Pidgin is a free-spirited city girl. An art lover and fashion enthusiast, she spends her time sketching or at the sewing machine. Pidgin draws inspiration from high and low, old and new: haute couture, street style, vintage and modern. Whether in a simple day-dress, an embellished hoop skirt, or dressed for an elaborate costume gala, Pidgin projects a style uniquely her own.

Joshua David McKenney is a Brooklyn-based artist, illustrator, and doll-maker. Originally from Lancaster, PA, Joshua moved to New York in 1999 to become a professional illustrator. After years of creating two-dimensional art, Joshua began experimenting with sculpture, mold-making, casting, and eventually porcelain—a progression that naturally led him to dolls, a life-long fascination. The result is Pidgin. A modern take on the classic European fashion doll. Pidgin is an expression of Joshua's aesthetic and his lifestyle in Brooklyn, NY.

Each Pidgin is one-of-a-kind art doll. To order a custom doll, complete the attached form. The artist will respond directly via email to begin a collaborative dialogue.

When you order a custom doll, you can specify complexion, eyes, hair, and other features. You can also help to design Pidgin's outfit. Each Pidgin comes with a removable dress or shirt/skirt combo, stockings, and resin shoes with ribbon ties. Additional custom garments (jackets, gowns, pants, shorts, hats, etc.) available upon request.



*"One of the many things I love about Josh's dolls are how completely personal they are, clearly based on his drawings and fashion sense. You have to be a bit obsessed to even attempt what he's doing. Trust me, I know about this."
-Mel Odom*





Pidgin requires a minimum of 4 to 6 weeks to complete. Prices vary according to the specifications of each order. A 50% deposit is required to generate a sketch of your custom doll and begin production, with the balance due before shipping.

Where did you then learn to create and cast molds?

I have always been interested in sculpture, but I have never had formal training in it. Initially, I just messed around with Super Sculpey, making little figurines, faces, and hands. Then in 2008, I became obsessed with Asian ball-jointed dolls and aspired to make my own. I bought a book called *Yoshida Style Ball-Jointed Doll Making* by Ryo Yoshika, and following along with the pictures, (the book is written in Japanese) I created LoveChilde, my first doll. She's a ball-jointed doll sculpted from Japanese air-dry paper clay. While I was pleased with LoveChilde, I felt that the most timeless and exquisite dolls were made of porcelain. So, with the help of online guides and instructional videos, I slowly taught myself how to make plaster molds, and began casting porcelain at a ceramic studio in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. My first endeavor in porcelain doll making—a ball-jointed mermaid doll with a segmented tail—may have been a tad ambitious. It involved countless hours of work, several failed molds, and a scrap heap of defective pieces. The process was painfully slow and frustrating. In hindsight, though, it was an incredibly good learning experience. Pidgin was my third doll design. I styled Pidgin after the classic European fashion doll: she has a porcelain head, hands, and feet attached to a soft, posable body. Pidgin is a modern girl with a vintage sensibility, so this “old-fashioned” construction suits her.

Are you inspired by other dolls or doll artists; fashion designers, illustrators?

I'm lucky to have two amazing doll artists in my close circle of friends: Mel Odom and Andrew Yang. I obviously knew of Mel Odom's work before I met him. From the first moment I saw them, Mel's illustrations resonated with me on a very profound level—as if they were speaking to me in the same visual language that I think with. The compositions, colors, and faces felt hauntingly familiar. I owned two of Mel's coffee table books, as well as a *Gene* doll. So of course, I was thrilled when I finally met him a few years ago at the Society of Illustrators in New York. We naturally began talking about dolls, and have been close friends





ever since. It is hard to express how influential Mel has been in my life; even in the three years I've known him personally. He's not only an amazing artist whose work I greatly admire, but also a kind friend who generously offers advice, affirmation, and support. Our relationship has really helped me to focus my work and develop as an artist. Andrew Yang and I first bonded over dolls, and have since become intimate friends. I reached out to him after reading about his amazing fashion rag dolls on a blog. My budding interest in dolls and doll making really began to focus and take shape during my friendship with Andrew, and I undertook some of my earliest doll projects in collaboration with him. His encouragement and advice have been instrumental in helping me to realize my ambitions.

How did you decide on the name Pidgin?

I was sitting on the Chinatown bus a few years ago, on my way to visit my boyfriend Eric in Boston. To pass the time, I did a watercolor of a quirky city girl with a pigeon on her head. I thought "Pigeon" would be a cute name for her. When I got to Boston, I gave the watercolor to Eric, and he and I started imagining what "Pigeon" would be like if she were a character in a storybook. Then I sort of forgot about it. Three years later, when I was sculpting my new fashion doll, Eric remembered the girl from the watercolor and suggested that I call the doll "Pidgin"... and he was right! We still talk about Pidgin—who she is, what she likes, what she does each day. We've started working on a book about her.

Where does your design process begin with the fashion?

The cool girls that live around me in Bushwick, Brook-

lyn, including some of my close friends, inspire pidgin's style. For example, if I see a girl wearing a funky, improvised-looking outfit on the subway platform, I'll think, "that's so Pidgin." I have a very clear idea of the kinds of clothes Pidgin would and would not wear. I always keep a few blank paper doll templates on hand from the Pidgin Fashion Design Contest, so that I can doodle outfits in my free time.

How long does it take to create one doll from start to finish?

Every doll is different. On average, it takes me 3-4 weeks to create a Pidgin doll from start to finish.

How did you learn to sculpt and fire clay to create your dolls?

I'm a self-taught sculptor and porcelain artist. I relied on books, online tutorials, and a lot of trial and error before I learned enough to create Pidgin.

How does one start the collaboration process if ordering a custom doll?

Custom orders typically start with an email inquiry. After a creative dialogue with the client, I create a sketch of their doll. When we are both happy with the design, I begin creating the doll. I require a 50% deposit after the design is approved.

Do you see Pidgin becoming a mass produced doll or is this an ongoing personal project?

Pidgin has been a very personal project for me. That said I have big dreams for Pidgin. I would love to see her make





her mark on the world.

Will you possibly produce the paper dolls in print for sale?

Yes. By the time this interview comes out, I hope to have released the first edition of the Pidgin Paper-Doll on my website, www.pidgindoll.com.

What prompted you to hold the fashion design contest for Pidgin?

I wanted to create a paper-doll version of Pidgin to highlight her unique sense of style. I held the Pidgin Fashion Design Contest 2012 as an online promotion for the paper-doll. I was truly blown away by the response. I received over 100 entries, many from young and aspiring designers. That's exactly whom I imagine as Pidgin's fan-base: the dreamers.

Will you produce any of the contest winner's fashions for the dolls?

I originally thought that there would be three winners, whose designs would be included in the paper-doll's wardrobe. However, the entries spanned such a wide variety of drawing styles and outfits that my co-judge/designer, Elena Kanagy-Loux, and I decided to create three categories with three winners in each. We are still working out how to print the paper-dolls, but I am hoping to make them available by Valentines Day 2013. I will do a limited edition run of 100 paper-dolls. If they are a success, I hope to do many more Fashion Design Contests. I like that Pidgin's fans can

interact with her in this way, and be involved in the design process. I want Pidgin to be the fashion doll for unique and creative people.

Are you planning other related dolls or products in the line?

I have a few Pidgin-related projects that I hope to get off the ground in the coming years. The best places to keep up with Pidgin are her Facebook page, www.facebook.com/pidgindoll, and her website, www.PidginDoll.com.

The Pidgin Doll Design Contest 2012

We are so impressed by the talent and imagination of all the artists who submitted designs to the *Pidgin Fashion Design Contest 2012*. To say that the response was overwhelming is an understatement. With over one hundred entries, it has been very difficult to choose winners--especially given the diversity of the fashion and drawing styles, and how much we loved different aspects of each of the designs. Since choosing only three favorites did not seem fair, our paper-doll designers, Joshua David McKenney and Elena Kanagy-Loux, decided to create three design categories and choose three winning designs in each category. Winning designs were chosen based on how well they reflect Pidgin's personal style: Fashion-Forward Retro, Fun, and Funky.

<http://www.pidgindoll.com/contest-results.html> ❖

