

Passion for PAPER DOLLS

by Christine LeFever



It began as a desire to add something special — perhaps a dear memento or sweet keepsake — to the parcels when I ship my dolls to their new homes. Standing in the center of my art room, I looked at all my various projects covering every available flat surface and then I saw something that clicked.

Recently I'd begun painting small portraits of the historical dolls I create by hand. Some of these watercolor paintings were drying on a tabletop. It immediately occurred to me that the women who wanted my dolls would also enjoy a small painting based on a doll.

At that moment, my slip-in paper dolls were born.

I call them slip-ins because I literally slip them into the box with the purchased doll as a combination thank-you note and little piece of artwork. The response has been gratifying. I've received letters and emails from my customers, telling me the slip-in doll now resides on the mantel or shares a place of honor with the actual doll. And they want more.

As you can guess, my customers are an expressive bunch. They tend to be attracted to my dolls because of their love of the traditional and the antiquarian, and many of us have followed the same journey in our love of dolls and old things.

Dolls have beckoned me since early childhood. With a child's endless curiosity, I gravitated toward every doll I saw. As one of eight children, I seldom visited an actual toy store. Luckily, Santa brought me my first memorable doll that I still love.

As a young adult I also grew to love antiques and old houses and aspects of earlier periods and lifestyles. Yet, whenever I went antiquing in search of items for my home, invariably it was the dolls that enticed me. Then, several years ago — when our children had grown to where they were far less demanding — I combined these two loves in my home-based business of reproducing dolls from earlier periods. Mainstays of my line have been papier mâché-head dolls based on Greiner dolls from the 1850s, milliner's models from the 1820s, Queen Anne



dolls from the 1790s and French carton dolls from the 1780s, among others.

From the start, my desire in making dolls has been simply to create a very old-fashioned doll that would naturally belong in an old-fashioned home as an accent piece, and would appeal to women who enjoy the look and feel of earlier times.

The slip-ins I create express my heartfelt gratitude and serve as another piece of historical interest for my customers, several of whom are now collecting my slip-ins as quickly as I can design and produce them.

Here's how to create a slip-in paper doll:

- Pick an image suitable for the paper doll you want to depict. I usually use my own doll portraits but also have used pictures of beautiful old-fashioned ladies from books and magazines.
- Scan this image and reduce it to the size you want — there are several computer programs you can use to do this — or take your images to a printing company and they can get you your prototype and print it on their printers. The point is, get the desired image to the size you want and then print it on card stock.
- Cut out the image. Scherenschnitte scissors — the kind for silhouette cutting — work best for detailed small images.

- Now attach the cutout image to a tiny folded piece of card stock using two-sided foam tape to make the image “stand out” from its base for more dimension. I add a special touch of glitter to each of my pictures.
- Write your message on the back or inside of the folded card-stock base and perhaps embellish it. I like to draw a flower on the back of the card where I sign it.

It's so sweet to have these tiny figures perched on a tabletop or a mantel or a shelf, where they can greet you when you notice them. They make for charming collections and the images you can use are endless. ♡

Christine LeFever's dolls have been featured in leading artisan directories and have appeared in several museums and the movie Felicity. To learn more, visit her Web site at www.christinelefever.com or check out her blog at www.christinelefever.blogspot.com. She lives with her husband in an 1888 Italianate house in Oregon City, Oregon.

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