

## **Translation of Barbara Odil Barbara Odil's Article in Textil Plus Article, December 2002**

The American artist Barbara Odil received her first drawing and painting lessons from her grandmother when she was eight years old. She knew quickly what she would later become: fashion or fashion accessory designer. Her formal art education at the University of Georgia indicated that she was indeed skilled, but ten years ago she found her true creative medium. Her artistic search and her character led her to make "primal spirits", figures inspired through ancient cultures from our earth.

Barbara is fascinated with the culture and life-style from the original people living around the world, for example the Indians and Intuit in America, the aboriginal in Australia and the early cultures in Mexico. She immersed herself in their religion and values, such as respect for nature. Her work carries this message. On the one hand her work conjures up images of native people and tribes, but on the other hand the materials she uses come as much from nature as possible.

The bases of her unorthodox dolls are made from bamboo, using steam to bend the bamboo into the proper form. For the clothes she uses all possible, natural materials such as palm leaves, cotton, fleece, sheep wool and rubber. The dolls have masks rather than faces. The masks are made of clay and painted with textile paint. She chose textile paint because of its clear, almost shiny effect that this paint has on the clay. The clothes and mask are made together for one doll. She uses shells and other things she finds at beach for shoes and the entire doll is then decorated with beads and stones. The dolls are around 60cm high and can be hung or stand.

Barbara lives in the woods and often goes there to look for materials for her dolls. She found deer antlers, cleaned by birds and bleached by the sun. She took it home, sawed off the lower part and used it as the basis for a 'transformation doll'.

These dolls are made in the workshops that Barbara gives in America, these last few years. The students work with a theme 'important moments in life'. Everyone brings his or her own experiences, growing personally as their own dolls take form. During the workshop, when moments of enlightenment happen, the person takes a moment to reflect and write about their experience. Then questions are asked about how making the doll has changed a person and how that experience is represented in the doll, for example, the choice of materials, the choice of the form of an object and the color. This results in a 'transformational doll', a figure that represents personal changes.

Barbara likes leading these workshops and does so with much enthusiasm. It is an exception when the participants need help with an idea for a figure to visualize and realize. The last time she experimented with paper-mache and wood working and that opens many more possibilities. Much like life itself, her work is growing and changing. Her first and last thoughts remain the same, love and respect for what the earth offers us.