

# Aerodoll Article

# AERODOLL

We travel to Spain to visit with the artists of Aerodoll studio-

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One of the brightest new stars on the fashion doll scene is Aerodoll Studio. The studio represents the collaboration of Monika García and Rafael García-Cano. Together, these talented artists have taken the art of repainting fashion dolls to an extraordinary new level.

Monika is from the new, younger generation of women who have spent more time around technology than playing dolls. She explains: “The thing is that I couldn’t have my own dolls when I was a child. My parents found it more interesting that I experimented with computers, so they never bought me a doll. I used to play with the ones my friends had, and that was frustrating! When I was twenty, I went with a close friend to a toy store, and I bought my first Barbie doll, a simple play line doll with red hair. Since that time I’ve gone through different phases: the play line Barbie phase, then the Barbie collectibles phase, the regular Tonner phase, the Tonner repaints phase, and now I’m in the BJD phase. I bet many collectors find these phases familiar, too!”

Monika met Rafa, as he is known, in a business meeting on behalf of a client. “Monika came for the first time to my studio as a customer; she wanted to have her friend’s motorbike painted by me,” says Rafa. “I showed her pictures of my past commissions, and she loved my work.

That evening she emailed me with some pictures of both regular and repainted Tonner dolls, and she asked me to do something similar for her collection. Time went by, and we fell in love! So now we work on this little business as partners, and that’s great because we complement each other: I do the paint, and she does the rest—palettes, pictures, website, auction listings, advertising, etc.”

Rafa is a well-respected airbrush artist with a roster of international clients. Monika shares a bit of his history: “Well, I like to say that Rafa is a ‘natural born artist.’ When he was very young, a well-known Valencian art teacher (and close friend of Rafa’s family) proposed to his parents that he would show Rafa everything he knew about art because the kid had an amazing talent that should be developed. [Rafa]

started painting still life scenes with oils and pastels at the age of twelve and portraits at the age of fourteen. He’s got two university degrees in fine arts (paint/sculpture) and art restoration. At the age of twenty while he was working as a creative for an advertising company, [Rafa] discovered the airbrush, and he started learning by himself. Two years ago he started his own airbrushing studio: Aerodiseño. One of our best customers is Fernando Alonso, the current Formula 1 World Champion. We’ve been working with him for eight years now; [Alonso] started out by riding go-carts when he was just a kid!”

Monika is equally talented, but she remains rather modest about her own background. “When I was three, my father gave me a computer for Christmas. So I have twenty-six years of experience with [computers], and I cannot remember a single day in my life without having a keyboard in my hands. I work as a Linux systems administrator, website programmer, and software developer for Aerodiseño and also for *FDQ*, but you can see me also painting helmets, sanding cars, and of course, designing glamorous palettes for our Aerodolls.” Monika’s work as webmaster for *FDQ* has garnered quite a lot of attention and has inspired a few to try and copy her web design style! After all, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

The Aerodoll studio came about from the mutual interests of Monika and Rafa as well as their ability to work as a team. “It was really natural,” says Rafa, “because airbrushing is my work and dolls are Monika’s passion. All I have to do is follow her indications a bit and use all the skills and experiences I’ve been compiling through the years.” Inspiration for Rafa’s work comes from an eclectic assortment of sources. “As a professional airbrush artist, my work is inspired by top artists like Hajime Sorayama, HR Giger, and of course, Spanish [artist] Luis Royo. Different female faces also inspire us when redesigning dolls. What we try to represent in our dolls is that little cocktail of strength, magic, and mystery; of course, [we change the females’] roles



This page: Aeon, a repainted Sybarite, created by Aerodoll. From the collection of Alexandra Forbes. Opposite page: Rafiella, also a repainted Sybarite in the collection of Amanda Arnold.

from Royo's cyberpunk babes to real world models."

Monika and Rafa's mutual inspirations come, of course, from the world of fashion dolls. Monika observes: "We love working on Sybarites because their faces and body sculpts are absolutely beautiful; they have a great potential, and once repainted they look absolutely realistic and fabulous. And then we love Tonner dolls, too, because of the great number of different sculpts that share a common body. Our favorites are Sydney, Jac, and Mei Li."

And like most artists, Monika and Rafa have a particular vision of what their ideal doll would look like. "If we had the chance to create our very own fashion doll, she would be 16 inches tall and fully articulated. Her face and body sculpt would have the style and appearance of Lladró figurines. We have a friend who works as a sculptor for this company, and we admire his creations for the extreme beauty, delicacy, and outstanding expressivity his faces show."

The process of creating an Aerodoll exclusive comes from a myriad of sources. Monika admits it is "a little bit of this, and a little bit of that. We have an extensive collection of books that show how to paint faces, [create] makeup styles, [shade] the human body under different lights, etc. We love to look at cosmetics ads in fashion magazines [that have] big pictures

even enhance their back, painting the spine and shoulders."

Like any artist, Rafa has his favorite tools and supplies. He uses Golden, House of Kolor, and Standox acrylics, Iwata airbrushes, and Windsor & Newton brushes. And the couple always advocates using a respirator when painting with an airbrush. This is an important consideration, particularly if you are an airbrush novice.

For Rafa and Monika, different dolls mean different considerations. They agree that BJDs are perhaps the easiest dolls to work with "because they are bigger and their bodies are so detailed that they seem to be shouting 'enhance me!' As for the most challenging, definitely the Sybarites, because they're very expensive and we know our customers will ask us for the finest art and the best quality. And we love challenges!"

With such a unique style and quality craftsmanship as hallmarks of Aerodoll, *FDQ* asked the duo what collectors could learn from their experience. Monika spoke about website design for the doll aficionado. "I would tell [collectors] not to be afraid of being creative. I love simple, but elegant, websites with big pictures where dolls can be seen in all their splendor. Though it's been very popular during the past years, I don't like huge flash animations. I

## **"We love getting emails from our customers with their first impressions when unpacking their Aerodolls. Their illusion is our best reward."**

of models' faces because they help us to know what's 'in' now in makeup." Monika laughs, "And Rafa, as a natural born artist, is in love with the concept of feminine beauty!"

Airbrushing is not for the faint-hearted. It takes time and skill to work with the airbrush, and the challenges are the same for Rafa as with any doll artist. The eyes, in particular, are difficult. "Definitely the eyes," concurs Rafa, "and not just for the tiny size of the eye sculpt, but also because it's very difficult to control an airbrush when working in such a small area. It really requires a lot of skill and concentration." Monika agrees: "Besides [the practical difficulties of painting], the eyes should reflect the soul of the doll, and that's not an easy task. When I look deeply at any finished Aerodoll and have the feeling [that she is] about to talk to us, that makes me real satisfied with my work."

The process for creating the doll can take some time. Monika and Rafa completely remove the original paint, and both face and body go through a process of preparation before applying the airbrushed paint. "Rafa's airbrushing specialty is hyper-realistic illustrations. So with the dolls, he always tries to make them look as realistic as possible. For that reason, we add to all of our Aerodolls an exclusive airbrushed three-dimensional blushing, shading, and contouring that includes freckles, tattoos, and other body marks real bodies have." Rafa adds, "With the Sybarites, we

think that websites completely made with flash have big limitations; besides, they're very slow to load. Of course, this is just my very humble opinion."

Rafa and Monika's work has made them quite popular with their customers, and Aerodoll Studio grows each week. "We've accepted commissions in the past, but now our book is closed because of the great amount of work we have," Monika says. "Currently we're selling our Aerodolls on eBay. Perhaps you might remember the Jewels of the Mediterranean Series? We're preparing a new series of dolls that will look completely different from the Jewels. And we have plans for our website's salesroom that will see the light very soon with new and exciting surprises!" When asked to elaborate, Rafa responded sincerely, "No one knows what the future will bring, but we'd love to keep making collectors happy. We love getting emails from our customers with their first impressions when unpacking their Aerodolls. Their illusion is our best reward."

In addition to Aerodoll's beautiful artistry with dolls, the studio's photography is equally impressive. Again Monika was modest when *FDQ* addressed this. "Thanks for your nice comments, but I still have a lot to learn! Fortunately, I think I have the best doll photography teacher in the world! I [would, however,] tell people that they have to be very patient when photographing a doll. Sometimes, it takes



Willow, a Luts Lishe, is airbrushed in the Aerodoll studio. Her face, hands and body are all carefully painted in the most realistic way.



me hours and several hundred shots to get 6-8 pictures I find useful for our site or our auctions. I always use a white background because [this will make sure that] the doll attracts the full attention of the viewer.” Rafa adds, “A big percentage of our customers agree that Aerodolls are far more beautiful and detailed in real life than in pictures, and that’s true. Sometimes a camera cannot show little details like pearl eye shadow, a shimmery and glamorous neckline, and the extra-soft volume effect on a doll’s lips. A customer of ours [coined the phrase]: ‘What you get is DEFINITELY much better than what you see.’”

Our own contributing editor, Alexandra Forbes, has helped Aerodoll’s work along. Monika and Rafa met Alex when she and her husband moved to Spain last year. “A few months ago we had the luck to meet Alexandra Forbes, who has filled us with new ideas, wise advice, and absolutely amazing photos. She’s our dear friend, and we could never be thankful enough for all that she’s teaching us.” According to Rafa, “We renewed our website a few months ago, and we’re very excited because we have lots of new ideas for the next few months. Besides, we’re working with Alexandra on an absolutely exciting project that collectors from all around the world are going to *adore*. Stay tuned!” ❖