

The Original Doll Artist Council of America (ODACA) is an organization for doll artists who create one-of-a-kind original work. Founded in 1976 by Bess Fantl and five other doll artists in San Diego, California, it is dedicated to promoting, preserving, and encouraging the art of doll making. Despite distance, all of the artists work together, united by a common bond - a love of dolls and a love of creating original dolls. Bess was especially proud of being associated with so many fine artists whose hard work and spirit of sharing made the organization what it is: because ODACA is its members. ODACA Artists continue to share their dolls and knowledge with collectors so that many others will find the joy and fulfillment they have found in their art forms.

One of the exciting aspects of ODACA is the diversity of its members. The organization is open to skilled artists of all backgrounds through application and a juried process to ensure members create their dolls using the highest skill levels. ODACA artists make dolls in a wide variety of styles and mediums, including porcelain, paper clay, polymer clay, cloth, felt, paper, and wool. The organization promotes the art form and encourages members to push the boundaries of what is possible with dolls. The diversity of styles and techniques is what makes ODACA so unique and appealing.

One-of-a-kind doll artists often work hours alone in their studios, which can lead to isolation. Practicing their art requires focused attention to detail and the skills of a sculptor, painter, pattern maker, seamstress, cobbler, hatter, shoemaker, hair stylist, and other requirements too numerous to mention. So, ODACA Artists are always happy to learn tips and tricks from fellow doll makers, see what others are creating, and, of course, have the opportunity to get together with other members of like mind, resulting in lively exchanges of information and new friendships. Additionally, communication among members is fostered through Expressions, a quarterly newsletter, online meetings where members share knowledge and skills, and the annual ODACA Day saleroom for member artists to display and sell their dolls. These are some ways ODACA provides support and resources for its artist members.

The highlight of ODACA's year is the annual ODACA Day luncheon at UFDC, open to all conference attendees. A ticketed event, this year's luncheon, held on August 2, 2023, features a guest speaker, drawings for artist-donated dolls and other related items, an original artist-made souvenir doll for each luncheon guest, and the opportunity to win a special artist-created centerpiece doll at each table. Of course, a delicious lunch is always served. This year we are delighted to have Stephanie Blythe as our featured speaker. Famous for her porcelain fairies, she is the perfect artist to help us carry out this year's theme of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Luncheon reservations may be made online at ODACA.org; click on Events. The luncheon is so popular with UFDC members because of the excitement of meeting ODACA artists, the unique opportunity of hearing an accomplished artist as the guest speaker, the fun of chatting with collectors, and the joy of having numerous opportunities to acquire original dolls.

ODACA welcomes, as patrons, those interested in the art of artist dolls and supporting the artist members who create them. ODACA Patrons are a vital part of the organization and provide meaningful support through their invaluable presence during ODACA Day, their support of

artists, and being there whenever needed. During the luncheon, they assist with organization and set-up, serve as table hosts, run the drawing for artist-donated dolls and other items, and are there for myriad things that can pop up during an event. Additionally, they have access to the Members Only area of the ODACA website and early access to the yearly artist salesroom at UFDC. As Patron members, they receive the Expressions newsletter filled with new work from ODACA artists. Since many of them are doll collectors, they have a ready “window” into the latest work available from our members. ODACA welcomes and encourages UFDC members to become Patrons. Information on becoming an ODACA Patron is available on the ODACA website.

The National Federation of Doll Clubs (UFDC) has maintained a close relationship with ODACA for many years. UFDC provides conference space for the ODACA Luncheon and the Artists Showroom, held the same day as the luncheon, where member artists display their work for sale to convention attendees. Artists who display in the showroom work all year to provide their best work and are rewarded by brisk sales during showroom hours, 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The showroom is closed from 12:00 to 2:00, so artists can attend the ODACA Day luncheon and have the opportunity to chat with their collectors. Even if UFDC members are focused on vintage and antique dolls, ODACA welcomes all conference attendees to the salesroom to see what contemporary doll artists are creating. Visitors may be tempted to add one of the artist’s pieces to their collection!

UFDC has hosted ODACA artists such as Sandra Wright Justiss to give conference presentations and workshops to share their knowledge and expertise with doll enthusiasts and collectors. In the past, UFDC has provided a platform for ODACA artists to showcase their dolls to the public through unique displays, allowing them to share their love of doll-making. ODACA is thankful for the long and continued support of UFDC and its members. This is a complementary partnership of two organizations focused on promoting and preserving the art of doll making - one of the doll enthusiasts and collectors and the other of professional artists creating original dolls. We are always excited to be a part of the celebration of doll-making that defines the UFDC Conference.

In conclusion, as ODACA states on its website, “The contemporary doll artist is vital to the collectors of the future. Without the artist what would there be for the collector to collect - or for the historian to study? The story of ODACA and its artists will endure – their work will survive and be the ‘finds’ at auctions and dolls shows - proudly displayed in the homes of the present and become the treasures of the future.”

For more information about individual ODACA artists, the ODACA Day luncheon, and how to become an artist or patron, go to ODACA.org.

Carol Johansen
ODACA Secretary