

# Oh, those beautiful dolls!

By TOM MICHIBATA

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About two years ago, Uschi Ringleb-Mastrodascio figured her artistic creative itch needed a good scratch.

At the time the Mississauga resident was busy enough juggling life as a devoted wife to husband Sylvio and mother to son Alexander with her career as a freelance artist. She painted and sold oils and icons — works depicting scenes from the Bible.

But Ringleb (her artistic name) discovered she needed more, so she enrolled in a porcelain doll-making course.

Combining her zest for life, a fine eye for detail, perfectionist tendencies and natural talent, she has become one of Canada's foremost in the craft in the short time since.

Last October the 50-year-old German native took the blue ribbon for first place in the original doll sculpture competition, during the first Canadian Doll Convention in Hamilton. She submitted an impression of Alexander at age 4 (she called the doll, Sascha) and received a mark of 97 of 100. Entrants start with a score of 100 and marks are deducted for faults.

## Made from scratch

Made from super sculpey, a ceramic-like sculpturing composition, Ringleb, even had the eyes made by an oculist to enhance the doll's life-like qualities. It took her about a month to complete.

But inflicted with what people in the ilk call dollpox, Ringleb wanted to go one better. She set out to make an original porcelain doll from scratch.

Working slowly and deliberately, omitting not even the smallest detail, Ringleb devoted 8-9 hours a day over 2-1/2 months to making a 34-inch high doll of a young girl named Alessia, whose facial expression was taken from pictures of Alexander when he was younger.

Ringleb designed and sculpted her own mold from plaster of Paris, poured the porcelain slip into the mold, fired it up in her kiln in the basement of the family's Bud Gregory Blvd. home, smoothed the rough edges, painted it and, finally, sewed an outfit together.

The result was a Rolf Ericson Award for Outstanding Doll Sculpture at the prestigious Doll Artisan Guild competition in Oneonta, New York, about three weeks ago.

More than 400 dolls were accepted in 18 categories with Ringleb taking the blue ribbon in Original Dolls with



Photo by Jeff Chevrier

Uschi Ringleb-Mastrodascio began making porcelain dolls as a hobby. Her creations have won blue ribbons at major doll making competitions.

porcelain head, hands and feet. She was one of two Canadians to come home with a first. This time she scored a perfect 100.

"I was trying to be a full-fledged mother but, I found a couple of years ago I needed to get out of the house," Ringleb said. "It was a once-a-week thing but once you start, you get hooked.

"When you see all the mothers there making dolls, they are very sensitive whether they're making them as gifts for their children or maybe they're making them because they didn't have dolls when they were children themselves."

Ringleb said that giving her dolls life is the easy part.

"I found sewing on the buttons is most difficult because I have arthritis in my fingers," Ringleb said. "I love to create things. I was born after the war and we had lost everything. I had no toys — just a doll made out of old socks."

Because her husband works for Air Italia, Ringleb takes the opportunity to travel when she can. Mixing with the local people and cultures serves as inspiration for her work, whether it be oil painting or sculpting bronze statues or making dolls.

"I consider myself a child of the universe," she said. "I love people and usually the first contact you have is with the children."

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