

About Hard-bodied Dolls and Costumes

Vincent dolls can be adapted from jointed dolls found second-hand in thrift stores. These are inexpensive and fairly easily obtained.

Dolls

Figs 1 and 2 illustrate some of the many different sizes of mass market dolls which can be used (many made by the same manufacturer) and the varying joints and movements.

Ball joints allow a complete 360 degree rotation and some lateral (sideways) positioning (i.e. hip). Slot joints allow movement along one axis only (i.e. elbow or foot). A rotate joint allows an appendage to turn 360 degrees in one plane - no lateral movement (i.e. neck, waist). Basic joints for action dolls are: Rotate neck, ball shoulders; rotate waist; ball hip joints; elbow and knee slot; wrist swivel and slot, ankle slot. Unless otherwise stated, all dolls in the image below have these basic joints.

These dolls range in height from 4 inches tall (Fig. 2 - GI Joe) to 12 inches (Fig. 1 left: Ken-type martial arts). A standard GI Joe type doll (third from left), the most easily obtained, is 11 inches tall.

Dolls suitable for a Catherine are very difficult to find. Most female dolls are taller than their male counterparts. A Catherine doll's head should reach no higher than the shoulder of the male doll.

Regular Ken or Barbie type dolls, without joints at elbows, knees, wrists or ankles, are not recommended. Without these joints, doll clothing is much more difficult to make (requiring extra large openings) and dressing them is very difficult, since limbs have very limited movement.



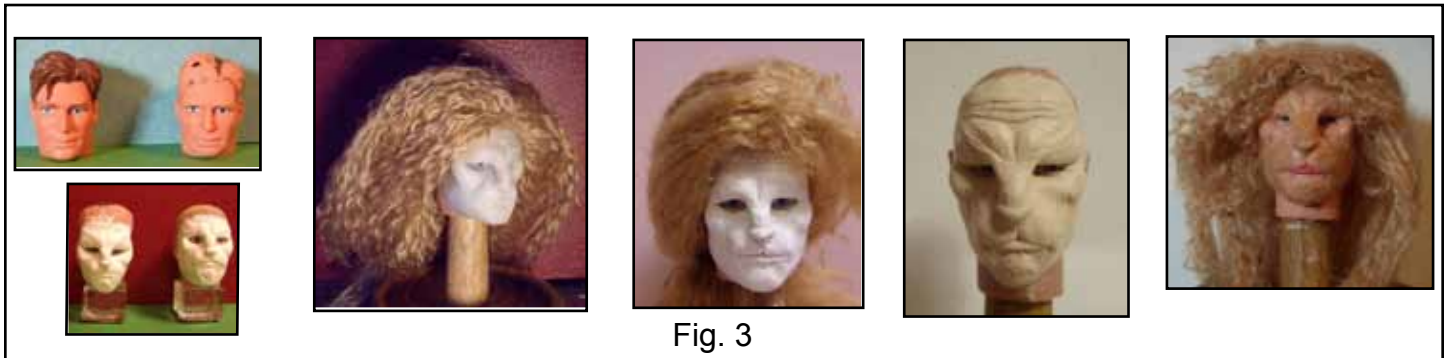
Fig. 1: Dolls. (l-r) Ken martial arts (extra rotate joint at upper arm), regular Ken (no elbow, wrist, knee or ankle joints), G.I Joe 1998, N'Sync puppet (feet and hands swivel, but do not bend, no waist swivel), wrestling character (full movement ball joint at hip), female wrestling fan, small action hero (full ball joint at hips, extra bend joint across fingers and toes), miniature action hero (shoulder joint turns only – no lateral movement).

Fig.2 GI Joe

Fig. 2: GI Joe action series doll, 4" tall, made by Hasbro (2008). Head, hands, torso and feet rotate 360 degrees, standard hip, knee and elbow joints. Other dolls in this series include a female action figure.

Heads

All dolls should have a solid or semi-solid heavy plastic head, so that they can be carved and the character head re-formed with polymer clay. Squeezable soft rubber heads cannot be used because they distort, cannot be shaped, and clay will not adhere. Older manufacture dolls are best (2005 or earlier). A head could be made from scratch by forming polymer clay or paper mache over a round wooden bead (the bead opening must be kept clear to fit a peg into the doll neck opening). Clay will not adhere to some kinds of plastic, such as brittle, porcelain or ceramic-like dolls. Since acrylic clay has to be baked at 275F, very thin plastic heads are not recommended. Epoxy putty (SculpWood) can also be used to form a doll head over a wooden sphere. Flesh-coloured clay will save some painting later, but choose a darker flesh colour over a lighter one, as some brands are so pale they seem white when used. The images below (Fig.3) show heads in various stages using different clays. All faces will need some colouring before hair is applied.



Painting

Even a head from an 11 inch doll is fairly small, so painting can be a challenge. Details are lost if regular water-based acrylic paint (2 oz/59ml bottles) is used because it forms a skin. It must be thinned with water. Model paint (water-based) is very thin with a very fine pigment. It can be used on even the tiniest head without erasing details. Artist acrylic paint (in tubes) can also be used if spread thinly.

Hair

Hair for any doll is added after the acrylic clay head is baked. Wool makes the best hair, and if separated into strands and steamed, is very soft and natural-looking. Small teenaged or baby soft-bodied Ty dolls, also found easily in thrift stores, have hair in colours that can be used for Vincent and Catherine heads. The hair is sewn onto a soft scalp piece which can be separated from the rest of the head. Additional hair can be moved from areas where it is not needed. Alternatively, Ty doll hair can be removed from the doll scalp and woven into a matrix, such as the fine plastic netting used to hold the three pack garlic sold in supermarkets. This can then be hot-glued onto the doll head.

Costumes

Dolls costumes must be custom-made to fit the doll used. Even among G I Joe-type dolls there are differences in length of leg, neck, shoulders, feet and musculature. The same is true for Ken-type action dolls.

Costume Fabrics

Because male action dolls have musculature in the legs and arms, it is best to use stretchy fabrics. Fabrics should be a very fine weave so that costumes are close to scale. Old socks tops make excellent Vincent pants and sweaters. The upper finished edge of the sock becomes the waistband for either pants or sweater. Grey ribbed socks (i.e. sweatsocks) can be made into traditional Vincent vests.

Leather was a major part of B&B costumes. Any leather used for doll costumes must be very thin. Gloves, hats, purses and fashion jackets all have suitable leather. These can be found in thrift stores. Leather should be very supple. Costume pieces should be whip-stitched together, as in the original costumes. A leather needle threaded with heavy cotton button or linen thread is best.



Fig.4: GI Joe Vincent in Masques costume and Mini Vinnie in classic grey vest