



Agnieszka Madaj - born 7 December 1974

1994- graduated from The Secondary School Of Fine Arts in Lodz, from the faculty of Functional Art Designing (A University Degree with A grade).

1998- a graduate from The Academy of Visual Arts in Poznan, from The Faculty Of Designing and Fashion Creation, speciality- Women's / Men's Wear Designer.
(A University Degree with distinction).

I have been designing and restoring old furniture for the last twelve years. I am also dedicated to dolls making, designing fabrics and tapestry (wall-hanging, bedspread, bags), wood and glass painting and interior designing.

You can visit my website at this address <http://www.malowanemeble.pl>

Achievements:

1999- diploma fashion show at The International Fashion Fair in Poznan in the final competition for "A Silver Loop".



2001- exhibition of Functional Art Designing in Warsaw in The Lubomirski's Palace, on the premises of The Business Centre Club.

2003- Polish Furniture Display in Vienna. Cooperation with a magazine "Fashion and Style" and a photo session for a monthly "Four Corners".

2008- "Babiloty" - Exhibition in Lodz at Muzeum Historii Miasta Lodzi

I have taken part in interior designing projects for Television in Lodz and Cracow and cable TV Toya. I have also made a series of paintings for a Jewish restaurant "Anatewka" in the biggest shopping mall in Lodz - "Manufaktura". Many a Polish celebrity commissioned my works, for example Janusz Zaorski, Maria Czubaszek, Artur Andrus, Stefania Grodzienska, Malgorzata Zwierzchowska, Aleksander Grotowski.

My works are in the private collections in China, the USA, France. Despite the fact that I am not Jewish (I come from The Old Polish Gentry), I am enchanted by Jewish Culture. My parents were involved in textile industry once formed by a multinational community of weavers, the forerunners of the modern city of Lodz. The numerous factories with their especially typical of Lodz industrial architecture of the huge unfaced brick, spinning and weaving mills give evidence to its outstanding history, and these traces, literature and even Jewish Cuisine have a great influence on me.

Inspirations

Multicultural Lodz and its history. It is an exceptional city where there used to live four nations; The Poles, Russians, Jews and Germans, all in a perfect harmony, next to one another. A thing quite unprecedented given these dark times that followed and the mutual relations among the nations. Because I paint old furniture, in their quest I stroll the attics of old flats, lofts in the factories and their cellars. I am enchanted with their appeal which have fallen into disrepair but used to be magnificent. Over the years and despite the dramatic history of our country they have retained their atmosphere and magic. In the silver dust from the past I come across old souvenirs of those days, different items, saved fragments of old furniture for example doors of a cabinet that could change into a beautiful picture. I imagine seeing the interior of the house where a Jewish family used to live and I try to restore its past. I am looking at some survived photos, sometimes grey, or yellowish and people in them, then in their prime and now nameless and forgotten. I strive to use as much as I can in my art.

This led me to make Jewish Angels dolls. They come on their delicate wings stay with us and linger to leave. I am a great lover of Isaak Bashevis Singer who was born in Poland before the Second World War and whose literature seems to be unlimited source of information and inspiration for me. Singer leads us into his magic world of emotions and passions, displays a mixed bunch of his characters coming from this part of the world where he used to grow up and gather his experience for the rest of his life. Like in his literature every doll is unique and exceptional just like his book characters. What is more, I have always been enchanted and inspired by Marc Chagall's paintings, especially the ones with those little provincial towns in which he presented everyday life of common Jewish people in a very poetic way.

Angels- Jews



Angels are good spirits of those who used to live among us, walk along our streets in Lodz wearing long black gabardine and boots. Those old long-beard Hasids were businessmen running their own enterprises and that explains why my dolls have small leather purses with some money inside. These Jews-Angels are

supposed to take care of our own businesses and make our own wallets full of money. In their magical inexplicable way they are to watch over our decision making and new acquaintances. Each doll is unique and exceptional. It is hand made from the very beginning. First of all , I prepare a head which is painted after having hardened it.

It is made of very special substance which I worked out myself, durable and resistant to being hit. The fabric I use for the body of my doll is always cotton coloured by me and prepared in such a way as to achieve one goal: make the cloth look old and yellowed as if it had strayed somewhere in the Jewish attic of the 70s. I usually sew clothes from satin and embroider them painstakingly with small details like, for example, tassels from very old curtains which are sewn on tales . The brims of the Hasids hats are embroidered with thin pieces of fur. The hair of the doll is made of a hemp rope. I would like these dolls to arouse our imagination, allow us to see the small ,before-the-second-world-war towns, feel the smell of Sabbath supper and finally allow us to see flying cockerels above the houses, carts and lovers embracing each other just like in the wonderful poetic masterpieces of Marc Chagall.

Marc Chagall was born in Witebsk, in the provinces of Russia and enthralled by its beauty he showed it to the whole world in his paintings . I wish my angel- Hasid Moshe would bring on his wings happiness for those who will possess such a unique beautiful and exceptional doll which makes one's house so different.

In Lodz, where I live, there is a very popular Jewish restaurant “Anatevka”. A lot of very famous people come to it , especially well-known actors and directors who often arrive in Lodz as honorary guests of the film festival “Camerimage” for example: Val Kilmer, Ed Harris, Laura Dern, David Lynch and many others. For “Anatevka” I made a series of pictures based on Marc Chagall's works and I painted them on pieces of furniture such as bed-heads drawers and even an old barrel. This is furniture or its fragments which survived the Second World War.



Devils

Devil- as a fallen angel is a perennial element of our Polish folk culture. It is always present in fairy tales, legends, romantic poetry and folk art, mainly sculpture. The first folk tales and legends appeared in the Middle Ages. In Poland there is still quite a big number of castles and palaces. Nearly each of them has its own legend with a devil in the background.

The nostalgic Polish countryside, swamps, impenetrable forests, fog raising above the meadows, country crossroads where the wind whistles and the roadside crosses are bending, all these stimulated local people intellectually. Folk tales, legends sprang up and circulated among people gathering around the fireplace on cold winter days and evenings. Nearby Lodz there is a little royal town- Leczyca- renowned mainly for

the devil called “Boruta” who had his residence in the castle of Leczyca.

Today there is a museum of the devil in the castle. There is a great exhibition of sculptures of devils made by different sculptors and folk artists. On the premises of the castle the Medieval tournaments take place almost every year.



When it comes to devil “Boruta”, he was very cunning and clever. To avoid being recognized he used to disguise himself as different characters. Sometimes he was a nobleman with a sword at his side, a lord on his castle falling many a true adventurer who dared to stand in his way with a single blow of his sword . He also had a reputation for being a womanizer. He especially enjoyed being the wind and playing tricks on young women for example lifting their skirts or dresses. Legend has it that such things still happen today on the premises of the castle in Leczyca.

Polish devils in the folk tales do not resemble of the lord and master of hell belching out fire. They are rather up to mischief , like frightening people but also give people a chance to improve . “Boruta” is said to be sitting in the cellars of his castle and taking care of infinite treasure. The Polish devil also possesses a lot of human features. He enjoys dancing, laughing, games and women. He is a very ingenious and cunning fiend. He changes his disguise but never his skills or attributes. He is believed to be sitting on a barrel full of gold and guarding a treasure. He is rather amiable or even good natured or thoughtful. The Mayor of Leczyca gave a sculpture of “Boruta” as a present for The Pope John Paul II. The gift was accepted and now it belongs to the whole collection of souvenirs brought to Vatican from Poland.





The devil manufactured by me guards our wealth and all our possessions just like legendary “Boruta” watching his treasure. Dressed elegantly in lace shirts, beautiful jacquard frock coats, velvet, velour pants and silk boots. He often holds glasses in his hand, for example opera glasses to better see our sins or misdeeds.

Whenever I start making these dolls I start with a head of the doll together with the wire construction of the body which is then stuffed. The buttocks and bellies are sewn up later. To avoid “Boruta” feeling lonely I created him a wife; a she-devil. Together they make a beautiful couple. She is elegant, kind hearted and smiling. Obviously, she wears the trousers at home. She is dressed in laces, a satin, puff-sleeved blouse and underneath her skirt she is wearing a red satin flounced slip and satin boots finished with fur. Her outfit is always accompanied by a purse into which she collects our offences... The very fabrics are carefully matched and beautifully arranged as far as colours are concerned. The dolls-Devils have all little details, like small glasses made of wire and painted gold, beads, pearls are added as buttons as well as laces, guipure and all these efforts make each doll a unique piece of art, sophisticated and beautiful. It makes our interior different and emphasizes our refined taste.



Grandmothers- Angels

What inspires me in the case of grandmothers- angels are old photographs and drawings in very old books presenting older elegant ladies. That is why my grannies are well groomed and polished from head to foot. They are never in a hurry and watch us painstakingly through their glasses. My dolls are wearing beautiful

dresses, lace accessories, hats, berets, lace gloves and elegant satin or jacquard boots. They have very little purses and opera glasses. Their underwear consists of elegant lacy pants. Grannies- angels come to us like Marry Poppins, an elegant, charming nanny with an indispensable bag or umbrella. With their bags they bring to our houses good magic, positive energy, they guards places we live in. I really do my best to make my grannies chubby and sew them beautiful clothes made of good quality fabrics. These are satin, jacquard, silk, cotton, linen. I add fragments of old laces to their dresses, dye them and weave in such a way that you could easily think they must have stayed somewhere in the attic for ages. Grannies- angels are supposed not only to take care of us but above everything else make our houses unique and different, beautiful, remarkable and original. None of them is repeatable. They are made to inspire and enthuse those who look at them.



Witches

A Polish witch according to a legend lived on the bald mountain and her name was Jaga. She was a herbalist and used to help her husband, an old brigand to regain his stamina. My witches are amiable, charmingly smiling, beautifully dressed and very elegant. They are also quite crazy and devious, which is often seen in the way they are dressed. They also have purses. They put there different herbs from the woods and cure crazy thoughts and ideas. They are smiling playfully and land in our houses on the corner cupboards or hang from the ceiling. They have long brooms made of birch twigs. Their clothes consists of fancy pants finished with laces and colourful skirts which leans against the broom. They are wearing puff-sleeved blouses and a necessary scarf on the head just like ordinary country women. They are supposed to be likeable, add some strength by means of their magic and herbs and bring into our lives some colourful magic.



Cats

I love cats. Each of them has got his own secret life. They are mystical secretive creatures. They are real individuals and very seemingly dependent on us. They lead a night life about which we know little. They leave at night, come back in the morning and fire out imagination. They always land on their feet and have nine lives. When they sit on our lap they pretend to be an innocent, they purr with half- closed eyes only to leave a bit later and sharp their claws for their feline offences. They are always a very satisfying subject of painting. A lot of artists use them as a leitmotif of their art. My cats are every inch aristocrats haughty and elegant. They are wearing velvet frock coats and tailcoats, sophisticated satin shirts with a cravat. They are pot bellied, a little bit hearty and necessarily they are wearing long boots, finished with fur just like in a famous fairy tale “Puss in the Boots”. A funny velvet mouse is hanging from their hands. Loved by children they adorn children’s room.



Handbags

A beautiful handbag is a vital attribute of every elegant woman. In the old photographs we can watch ladies with an omnipresent bag hanging over their shoulders. In the old days it served one purpose-ornamentation. It was usually small, beautifully embroidered and decorated with precious stones, pearls or gold threads. It was often in the shape of a pouch, made of velvet and done up with a decorative buckle.

I love making my handbags . Somehow they are changing over the years .Wherever I am and whatever I do I always look for inspiration. The Museum of Fashion and Clothes is a perfect place for having a closer look at how the fashions changed over the years, their workmanship and designs . It suggest new ideas and is real food for thought, which on the other hand explains my series of velvet bags with leather portraits of women. Decorated and embroidered with crochet laces the bags are perfect reference to the old-fashioned style. They are to recall old times when a handbag was a piece of art. There are also handbags which one could describe as modern, up-to-date. Instead of leather portraits, they have little copies of great works of my favourite artists: Klimt, Chagall or some Polish artists like, for example, Nikifor. I love playing with different shades of colours, surround myself with colours and through these pictures create a nice atmosphere. That is why I paint little pictures on handbags, leather jackets walls and furniture.

My handbags are decorated with medallions painted on one hundred- year- old- leather which I get from very old chairs and armchairs. The leather is dried- up and wrinkled in a very natural way and all these make the portrait look like the one that survived war time and was taken from a museum. If the leather is new I made it look old to preserve the character of the handbag. Around the pictures I sew different elements which I usually crochet with colourful floss, add sequins breads, artificial pearls, glass beads etc.

I take pride in possessing quite a big collection of old buttons, jacquard tapes, laces etc. which serve one purpose- to make my handbags more original and unique. An exceptional handbag is a nice complement of the whole outfit. People perceive us through what we wear and how we wear the things. The handbag can express our personality, underline our individualism, it attracts attention, arouse someone's curiosity, stresses our character. It is a little piece of art which can also be very functional.



Furniture

Work on furniture is very challenging and testing both in artistic and technological terms. I concentrate mainly on its renovation, restoration and alteration. The first stage is to find a beautiful piece of furniture. Therefore I look for it in the attics, flea markets, desolate houses and so on. There are still a lot of antique, historic pieces of furniture in Poland. I clean and polish it, paint my pictures on it and often convert it into quite a different object, for example, an average coffee table after adding some drawers and adjustable mirror in the shape of fish turns into an original dressing table. Sometimes I make additional elements for the squat wardrobe which imparts a new look to it. These can be for example angels with movable wings, fish or cockerels. These efforts make the wardrobe look a bit taller and more interesting. I take a liking to old furniture because of its unique form and shape. My happiness is double because I realize that I am giving it a second life, a new quality and simultaneously save it from destruction. Yet, there are some people who do not appreciate old furniture. They do not know that it is made of wood which still has resin and therefore is not susceptible to warping and much more, it is almost imperishable. I really like working on furniture. I can enjoy my artistic freedom then. Of course, in the wood processing I use machines but many an element I made myself. The very fact that all big wardrobes consist of smaller pieces put together is very favourable, which makes my work easier. So far I have worked on, I dare say, every kind of furniture. It was: chairs, armchairs, dressing tables, wardrobes, tables, kitchen dressers, display cabinets, linen chests, chests of drawers, taps, trunks, beds, partitions. In my house all furniture is my works from beginning to end, let alone a bird feeder on the balcony.





My furniture can be used to decorate different interiors, beginning from rustic and ending with very modern ones in which it breaks its simplicity. A painted piece of furniture becomes a functional painting, piece of art. It makes the interior different and shows that its owner is a remarkable person with questing mind.

It often happens that I paint pictures on furniture elements that were saved over the years. These can be doors, fragments of counters bed-heads or window frames. In short- practically every single element of wood big enough to make painting possible can be used. Sometimes I add to it a carved fish or cockerel. Then something original and remarkable emerges from the simple plank, a painting. Sometimes I paint pictures in the drawers or pastry boards, wash boards and once I painted a copy of picture by Marc Chagall on a very old barrel.



Fabrics, clothes, colours

I like colours and I feel the need to be surrounded by colours. That is why I live in a house where there are only old furniture painted by me, I sew the fabrics for the walls, beds etc. I wear painted leather jackets on which you could find pictures of my favourite artists, i.e. Bosch, Frida Kahlo, Marc Chagall, Stasys Endrjiejevicus and a representative of Polish Naiive Art- Nikifor and many others. Even on the kitchen floor and patio floor I laid the mosaic floor inspired by the works of aVienna artist- Hundertwasser. I design and sew my clothes myself. I graduated with honours from The Academy of Visual Arts in Poznan from the faculty of Design and Fashion Creations. I showed my diploma presentation at the International Fair in Poznan in the final contest of 'The Silver Loop'. I designed and made my own collection of hand-made, batik clothes. The models presenting my products had their feet painted suggesting original tattoos which enhanced the colouristic effect of my show. This effort was very successful and aroused enthusiasm and interest of the media.

I like riding my bike and I often go riding to the nearby forest. I spend my holiday in the Kashubian countryside dynamically and actively. I have a funny dog. Its name is Bruno and I often go for a walk with him. The very contact with nature is very inspiring for me and often make me fall into a reverie. It is poetry that floats about the Polish country roads and makes me full of new ideas for new paintings. I especially like the subject of a thoughtful Angel, and a small town at night; a bit like in the pictures by Chagall, where everyone is sound asleep, towns are empty and our imagination suggests new images! There you can see flying cockerels and in the middle of the square an old tailor appears holding a very old sewing machine in his hands. Out of his back two wings seem to grow out. Moreover, there are cats as if my dolls entered my artistic reality.

I am rather a colourist and I prefer using pure colour. I use different techniques, I make experiments and I am an instant seeker. I succeeded in using batik and crayon on wood.

I have also painted my original fairy tale themes on the walls of children's room and I have designed and made paintings on the walls of a big loft.

I have also made glass windows- large glass spaces with paintings inspired by works of Alfons Mucha. One of it is placed in the barristers chambers in Lodz , another in the hall of a pharmaceutical company, the following in the beauty spa, and a private flat.



They have changed these places considerably and proved that art can be functional. When I paint little provincial towns, historic buildings, sometimes crooked houses, old wells, benches, angels and cockerels then I believe wholeheartedly that imagination is infinite.

Among my clients there are people connected with art, famous Polish artists, journalists, directors, for example Janusz Zaorski- a well- known director, Artur Andrus- TV and radio reporter, Stefania Grodzienska- a Polish writer and columnist , Wojciech Karolak - a jazz musician, Maria Czubaszek- a satirist and many others.

I would like my works to bring into people's busy lives some nice atmosphere, to let us come back to the fairy land of our childhood and to move our a bit rusty imagination in the times when everything is ready made (film, TV, advertisement) and when we are losing it slowly.

Agnieszka Madaj

