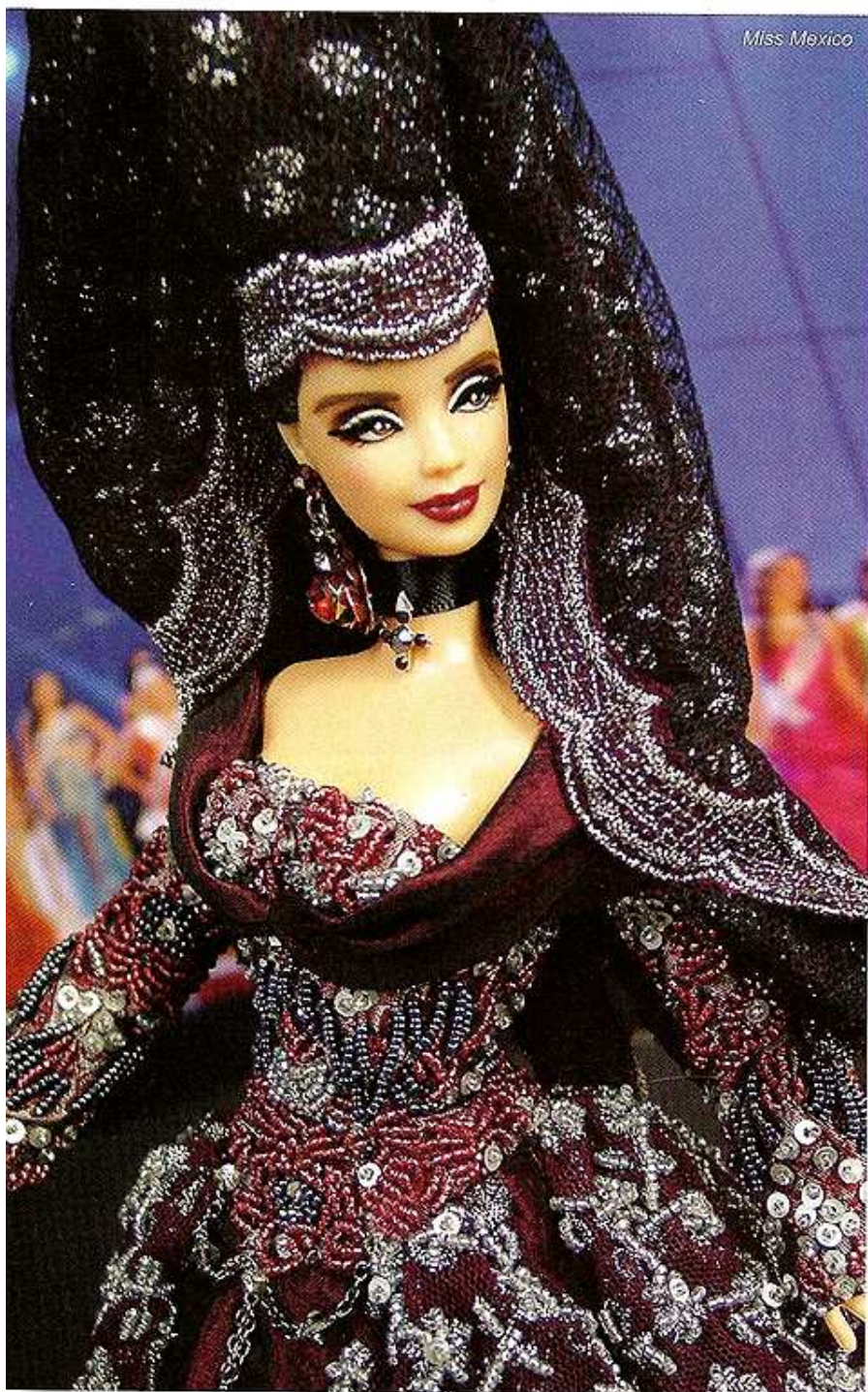


Pageant PASSION



Miss Mexico

COMBINING A LOVE OF PAGEANTS AND A LOVE OF DOLLS, NIK MORONESE AND MARIE LEBRETON'S ONE-OF-A-KIND PAGEANT-THEMED *BARBIE* DOLLS STILL STEAL THE SHOW.

By Kathryn Peck

“There really isn’t any question about which doll inspired us to create NiniMomo,” says Nik Moronese. “For our generation, *Barbie* is an icon ... a household name.”

Nik Moronese and Marie LeBreton are the artists behind the NiniMomo name, and for more than a decade now the two have been creating remarkably detailed one-of-a-kind (OOAK) pageant-themed *Barbie* dolls.

The longtime friends began working together years ago after visiting a local *Barbie* doll show. Inspired by the work of other OOAK artists on display, Nik and Marie soon began work on their own OOAK designs.

They combined their designs with a lifelong interest and involvement in beauty pageant competitions (both are involved in pageant coaching, judging, and pageant gown design), and thus each doll became representative of a different state or nation in the pageant, depending on the collection. And with so many ethnic varieties of dolls available, according to Nik, *Barbie* fit the bill perfectly.

Miss Austria was the first doll Nik and Marie created together. “We had just gotten past the research part of

beginning this work, and we finally began to feel comfortable with what we were doing," recalls Nik. "Since we both taught ourselves how to hand-bead, the beginning was so time consuming. I was so naïve, and I was actually beading one seed bead at a time, tying each one off as I finished." Since then, Nik admits, the hand-sewn beadwork has become a much quicker process.

Today, each OOAK delegate doll may cost between \$425 and \$800. Each begins with a complete facial makeover, rooted eyelashes, and a distinct hairstyle. All outfits and accessories are custom-made, and they perfectly re-create runway ensembles from today's top fashion labels like Christian Dior, Christian Lacroix, and Jean Paul Gaultier. "I think the hardest challenge in creating one-of-a-kind Barbie dolls is keeping your mind fresh with ideas," says Nik. "We are always inspired by the world's great clothing designers, but we also have many of our own designs as well."

In addition to its OOAK pageant-inspired dolls, NiniMomo hosts its own annual pageants following the completion of each collection. "The National Pageant Collection is held each year," explains Nik. The pageants, in the end, typically feature more than 200 NiniMomo dolls that are periodically released and sold. Judges are chosen at random, and it is open to anyone. Winners receive a custom-made tiara for their doll, a sash, a bouquet of roses, and a 35 percent discount on a future NiniMomo purchase. "The idea of hosting competitions at the end of each collection awarding customers with future discounts is a way of thanking those customers for supporting us through the years," says Nik.

"It's like our very own Miss Universe competition," he adds, "only without the scandals."

For more information on NiniMomo designs or to find out who the 2008 NiniMomo Dolls of the World contenders are, visit www.ninimomo.com or call 631-382-9386. DR

