

Yuan Anyi, 26, who specializes in makeovers for Disney dolls, mainly from the popular Duffy series, began after the first Disney resort on Chinese mainland opened in Shanghai.

“At that time, there was only the Duffy doll on shelves,” she said. “I customized my first doll in 2017 because I found the dolls bought from stores weren’t as lively and vivid as those portrayed by humans in the park. I wanted to make each of my dolls special and unique.”

She charges customers between 400-500 yuan a doll, depending on the number of accessories and the difficulty in makeovers.

She once changed a Stella Lou doll, a lavender rabbit with straight ears, into one with lopped ears, and it soon caught the attention of Hong Kong Disneyland and was featured in the park’s WeChat account. Customers flooded in for Yuan.

Her work feeds off the obsessions of doll owners.

“One customer bought lots of Duffy series dolls and asked me to give different expressions to each one,” she said. “She names each doll, buys each distinctive clothing and celebrates the doll’s birthday on the day I complete a makeover. They are her family members.”

In the “peak season” — usually in the latter half of the year — Yuan may spend 12 to 15 hours a day customizing dolls.

She makes their eyes shine brighter, adjusts mouths, reshapes ears, applies makeup and even installs her own patented plastic “skeleton” to make every part of a doll move.

“When I finish work, I take

pictures of the doll, send them to my customer and await their response,” she said. “A positive response is a moment of great happiness.”

Doll customizers have to be aware of health risks.

Wang has installed a large exhaust fan in her workshop because of all the spray used.

Another doll customizer calling herself Oraby told Shanghai Daily that large volumes of dust created in the makeover process leave her with discomfort in her lungs. But she isn’t contemplating a change of jobs.

“My customers have a special connection with me through the dolls,” she said. “The dolls are carriers of my imagination and all the beautiful things in my world.”

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The dolls are carriers of my imagination and all the beautiful things in my world.

Oraby

Doll customizer

Wang Han (right) shows the reporter a large Blythe model in her workshop.

