

## custoMONDAY: Win a Custom Skull Plush by Lana Crooks

Mon, Jan 5, 2009



### About Lana Crooks

We begin the first custoMONDAY of 2009 with a first for the series: plush. And who better to kick things off than full-time plushinator, [Lana Crooks](#)? As the proprietor of Crookedart, Lana spends her time between freelance illustration, costume and set design for film and TV, visual design for retail and, of course, making unique soft sea creatures and skeletons. Over the past couple months, we've [blogged](#) about her pieces in group and solo shows. Lana's work has been shown at [A.Okay Official](#) (where she is also a curator), [Get Knifed Gallery](#) and [Gallery1988](#), to name a few. You can view her creations 24/7 online at [Tor Gallery](#). The best place to keep tabs on the busy artist is at her [Crooked Art blog](#), and if you like what you see, you can pick up her plushes in LA at [Munky King](#). Or, you could win one right now. Which brings us to...

## The Contest

Although Lana has made plush skulls before (beginning with a piece for [Patrick Ma](#)), she's never had a name for them. **Since the skulls are becoming something of a staple in her art, she's looking for a name for the series. Leave a comment with your suggestion below and you just might win this one-of-a-kind soft skull.** The custom (shown above) measures 9"h x 8"w x 10"d. Lana will pick a winner from all comments received by Sunday, January 18th at 12noon PST. We will announce the winning entry shortly before the next custoMONDAY on 1/19.



## The Interview

**ToyCyte: Tell us a little about how you got into working with plush.**

LC: I got into plush kind of by accident. I went to school for and have a BFA in Illustration. I was working as a freelance illustrator and costume designer right out of school. The first plush I made was a backpack to house my costume / illustration portfolio while at the SDCC. After that I started toying with the idea of mixing the two mediums. I made a pink Octoplush named Bubblegum just to keep myself busy. It was well received and I started making more.



**Where do your ideas come from, and do you have a particular thing for sea creatures?**

I get inspired by things at random, a video game, movie, photo, nature, a trip to the museum or a joke. I often will be in my own head, walking down the street and I will just think of something and giggle. A good deal of my inspiration comes from my friends. Fellow artists [Max Bare](#), [Arkady Roytman](#), [Alex Willan](#) and myself tend to bounce ideas off of each other... we talk about the most ridiculous things. Sometimes I hang out at a sketch group and doodle but usually the doodle only goes somewhere if I already had an idea floating around.

Octopi, squid and giant toothy sea monsters are among my favorite things. They have so many arms; just think of how many things they could do at once. Not to

mention how very expressive they can be even though you can't see their mouths.

As for all other things aquatic, I grew up in South FL. When I was little my grandfather had a small inflatable boat, the "S.S. Lana Lee" was painted on the front...I was named captain of the vessel and we would tool around the lake in it. After that my father had a boat he named "The Lana Michele" (named after my sister and myself). I enjoyed fishing and my sister enjoyed turning green and praying for land. In high school I was considered the most likely to become a pirate. All of this may have prompted a fascination with the ocean.



### **Can you describe your working method(s)?**

I generally come up with some strange half-formed idea that I think is funny or aesthetically pleasing. I doodle. I pick out fabrics and other objects to add in. I occasionally work with a pattern but a lot of the time I actually just draw on the fabric. Creating the pattern is sometimes a feat in engineering. Cut, sew, stuff, battle physics, sew some more, add hardware and finally sign the piece. It is very rare that I do a multiple run of anything. Most of my pieces are one of a kind sculptural works but I have recently started working on skulls and surly sea stars that are smaller and of a portable nature.



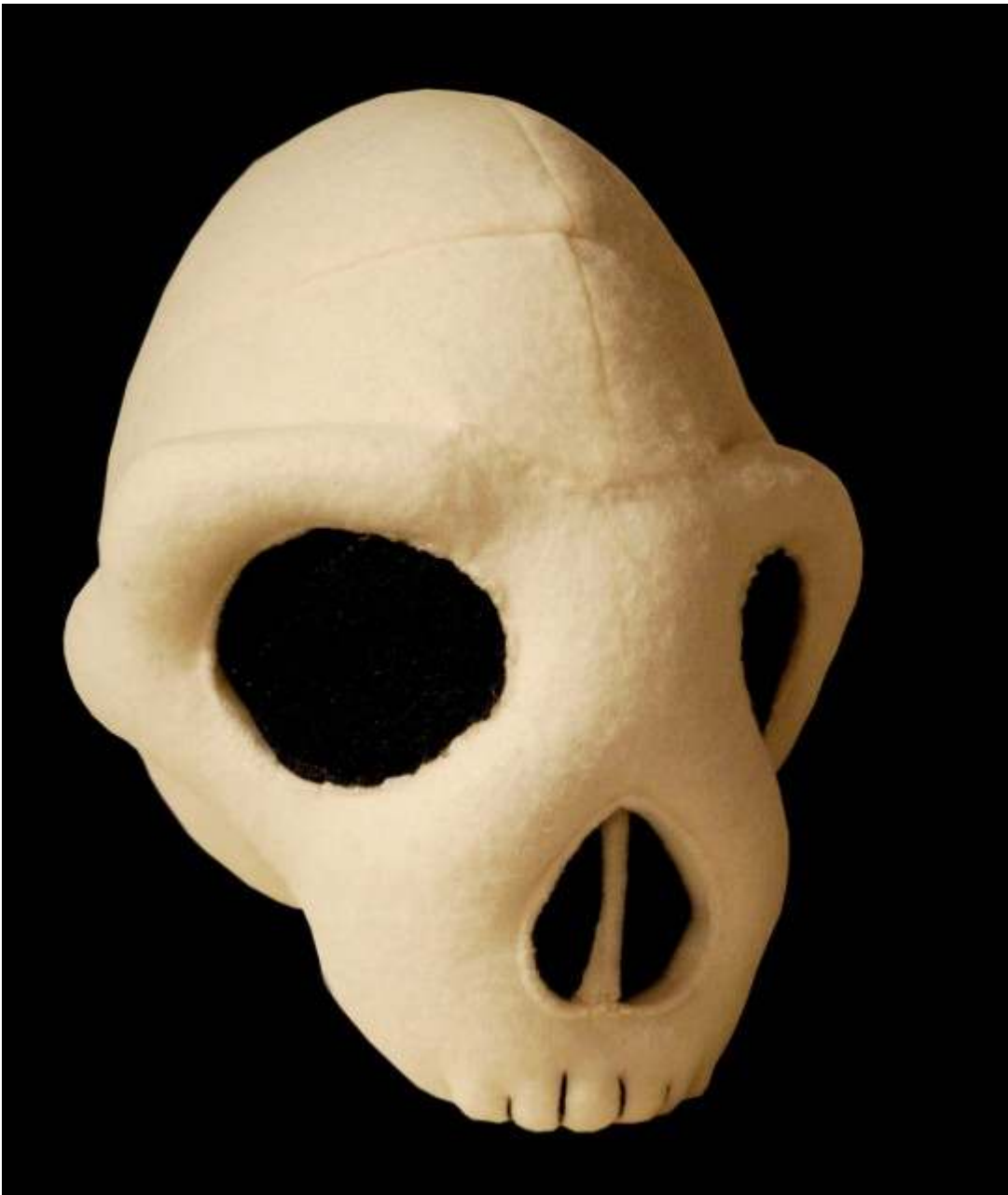
**How is creating your own characters different from customizing a platform (like Plushform or Munny)?**

Characters tend to start as an idea that may or may not be physically possible. One little spark from something I have seen or have heard. The finished piece can go in any direction and be any size. With customization I feel more grounded. For example, all I need to do to the platform is add to it, dismantle it or paint it. I tend to get ideas faster when looking at the shape of a blank rather than leaving my mind to wander aimlessly. The plushform was one of my favorite blanks to work with.



**Plush skulls seem to be a part of your repertoire. Tell us about your customMONDAY piece and what it is about skeletal softies...**

I am fascinated with all sorts of skeletons and I have a large skull collection near my workspace. I first incorporated a plush skull in a custom octo piece I did for Patrick Ma (Rocketworld). I posted photos on my blog of the piece in progress and I started getting emails asking about the skull. Because a real skull is so symmetrical and perfect it is quite challenging to replicate in soft form, lots of pieces in need of hand sewing. This specific skull is one of a very small run (6). The design will change slightly if I do the run again but I plan to diversify my plush skull collection this year.



**You got [a mention on BoingBoing!](#) Can you talk about what it's like to be an artist of this generation and the need to maintain and update your virtual presence?**

There is indeed a great need to update ones site, unfortunately I am horrible at it. [My site](#) is currently awaiting "The great overhaul". I am happy that I'm not so horrible at updating [my blog](#).

I am also very honored to have a gallery up on [Tor.com](#). It is through them that I got BoingBoing's mention. That mention also prompted more posting on my own blog.

Having a blog is far more convenient to update than my site, which I also have built and "maintained" for many a year. I post to my blog at least once a month about my upcoming shows and photos of new pieces. My website could only be so lucky. I think the fact that people can send a comment to me coupled with the feeling that I am communicating...something...makes having a blog more personal. Therefore, blogs are a lot less tedious.

**What can you say about the television pilot you did?**

The project was a series of short comedies. I worked as the costume designer, set costumer, art director, and make-up artist on "After These Messages."

I worked as the costume designer, make-up artist and plush wrangler on "Kusper."

I have done a couple videos and commercials with [Lowcarb Comedy](#) so far. We have discussed other adventures in the coming year. I have worked on a couple feature films but have really been enjoying the atmosphere of working with a bunch of comedians.

**I know I'm not the only toy collector/Top Model fan. What can you tell us about your contribution to Nigel Barker's *A Sealed Fate* fundraiser/show?**

I have worked with Carlos Torres and Sadie Woods before for their Rock the Future fundraiser ([you guys wrote about that](#)) and I was very interested in working with them again. My animal themed/friendly work will be projected on the walls of the space before the screening of Nigel Barker's film and possibly at the after party as well.

This specific screening will be at: The Silver Room in Chicago, IL (1442 N. Milwaukee Ave) on Wednesday, January 7th from 7-11PM.





**When you're not creating Crooked Critters, what else do you like to do?**

Generally if I am not working on Plush I am working on something else. Lately I have taken on a lot of other jobs in addition to keeping up with my shows and what have you. I have my own business that revolves around various Visual Merchandizing gigs. I travel nationally creating windows and displays for Virgin

Megastores, and I am now the visual consultant for A.Okay Official. In addition to all that craziness Max Bare and I have recently become A.Okay Official's gallery curators. Even though I have less and less time these days, I will still pull a video game all night-er. I'm a video game nerd, and I do not discriminate on the system.



## What toys do you collect/artists do you admire?

I collect comic books and books of all kinds. I have a menagerie of vinyl and vintage toys. I have a growing art collection, mostly due to having artistic friends. My house is turning into a toy/science/textile/natural history museum.

I admire the work of Jim Henson, Arthur Rackham, Dr. Seuss, Shaun Tan and Liz McGrath to name a few. I find great joy in a lot of different art and am honored to know so many talented people. I am currently planning some collabs with some of my favorite and most admired artists. They are mostly in the planning stage but I will definitely be posting something as everything falls into place.

## Looking forward to it!



**Geoff Williams** Says:

January 5th, 2009 at 2:31 pm e

It's from "the Paleoclothic era" (or Paleoclothic collection, as if in a museum).



**Jeremy Brautman** Says:

January 19th, 2009 at 10:07 am e

After a no-doubt near-blinding bout with sorting through comments, Lana has crowned the winner: Paleoclothic Collection by Geoff Williams! There were so many great submissions, and this was a really fun custoMONDAY to read and a really hard one to judge. But as NBP joked above, "you reap what you sew!"

I'll be getting in touch with you Geoff, but everybody else: we will offer a few handmade plush skulls by Lana Crooks (part of the new Paleoclothic Collection!) for purchase through ToyCyte in the middle of February. So please, check back, for an opportunity to get one. And if you're not Geoff, don't be blue on MLK day: our next custoMONDAY contest will go live in 2 hours for another chance to win a great custom toy.

This post was written by:  [Jeremy Brautman](#)