



Donny, by The Monster Factory



Lucy, by The Monster Factory



**Quirky:** The Doodolls characters are used in plush toys as well as other lifestyle products.



Philip, by The Monster Factory



Gordon, by The Monster Factory

# Doll-iciously weird

**Ugly is the new cute for children's dolls.**

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**G**ROWING up, most of us probably had that prized doll that we cuddled to sleep every night - it could have been a cute baby doll, a fluffy teddy bear or a lovely little princess.

Kids today, however, may prefer to be tucked in with a monster doll instead! Just take a look at the nearest shopping mall or toy store, and you are likely to see some decidedly non-traditional dolls being sold alongside the more conventional teddies and baby dolls.

Anything from humanoid voodoo dolls to scarred, cross-eyed animals and oddly-shaped monsters are all eagerly snapped up. Even



teenagers and adults can often be seen proudly displaying these kooky, odd-looking dolls, sometimes as desk ornaments or key-chains.

If all this is anything to go by, "ugly" could be the new cute. (By the way, the Oxford dictionary defines cute as "ugly but adorable".)

The appeal of these misshapen moppets may not be immediately apparent but to fans, it's obvious.

Dolls like these offer an alternative view of beauty. Instead of appreciating a doll for conventional reasons, these dolls clearly send a message that unconventional appearances can be attractive too.

Chew Kai Xin, marketing manager of Doodolls (their monster-like characters appear on plush toys as well as other lifestyle

products), says it's definitely cool today to be quirky.

"Our fans get the idea that something others may consider strange, weird or not-so-pretty looking can be seen as unique and extraordinary," she explains.

The Uglydoll plushes, now available in Malaysia, also apply this principle: according to their website, the dolls' creators wanted to create a universe where "ugly" meant unique and special. The makers combine traditionally "ugly" features with cute, and obviously, it works; the dolls are immensely popular worldwide, and even the United States' first daughter Sasha Obama has been spotted toting an Uglydoll.

Of course, unconventional dolls are not an entirely new notion. Some of us may remember playing with scrappy Raggedy Ann dolls, the Picasso-esque Mr Potato Head, or the stumpy Troll dolls with their shock of neon hair. The past decade or so, however, has seen a boom in these kooky companions' popularity, thanks in part to animated movies like *Monsters, Inc.*, *Shrek* and *Lilo & Stitch*, all of which feature monster-like characters which are nevertheless loveable.

The increasing presence of anime movies featuring odd-looking characters (such as *Spirited Away* and *My Neighbor Totoro*) has also changed traditional perception of what is considered cute.



The Uglydolls

Andy, by The Monster Factory



Astroneil is a character from The String Doll Gang by Kamibashi.



Some French Guy is another character from The String Doll Gang.



Mr Benda from The String Doll Gang.



Soft toys from YooHoo and Friends.

Style Co, local distributors of Kamibashi products.

This emphasis on giving a doll its own personality can also be seen in Canadian manufacturer The Monster Factory's dolls (available at <http://monsterfactory.net>). Not only do they create wildly different monsters - everything from blobs to aliens to indeterminate animals - but they also give each doll a story, like Andy who "never misses an opportunity to act out scenes from his favourite movie, in detail, with sound effects."

It's definitely time to let those lurking monsters out of the closet. They may be dolls, but they're more than just child's play!



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The YooHoo and Friends range of plush toys.



Shelly from The String Doll Gang.