

Soulful Creations

Kirste McCool finds out more about the couple behind the delightful Dufeu bears

When Eva Dufeu's parents gave their new born baby a Steiff bear, they could hardly have known it would spark off a passion for bears that has lasted all of her life. Eva with her husband Gunter are the creative force behind Dufeu bears.

Dufeu bears are becoming hot favourites with collectors worldwide. They are beautiful bears made with deep love and care, which manifests itself in their balanced design and exquisite

detail. Although tempting to focus on the fabulous outfits of the Dufeu bears, the actual bears beneath should not be overlooked. The bears themselves are absolutely wonderful; each little face has eyes that melt the heart. Looking through the Dufeu gallery it is impossible to pick a favourite as each bear almost surpasses the last. Their bears stand alone, naked if they needed to, each bear is not a replica of the last, each has been given his or her own personality before any

clothing has been added. It is what makes them bear artists and not costumiers. Just look at the faces on their bears and you will see that somehow they have created individuals. When the outfits are added to the bears it is to enhance the artist's vision. These are very carefully made to compliment the bears who have already had their own characters formed by the design and construction that Eva and Gunter have created.

Having marvelled at their beautiful bears, especially those with centre seam head, (a favourite of mine,) I contacted the couple to find out more about them.

Eva and Gunter are based in the city of Mülheim an der Ruhr; situated in the west of Germany. They are married with four children, Ben, Serge; Michele; and Denise, aged between 16 and 25.

"We love art and classical music. We also like to visit antique markets. We love nature and walking with our two Jack Russell dogs; Skip and Prickle. We are



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT
McHappiness,
Archie and
Manfred

both creative." In the past Eva studied Graphic Design and later she worked as a professional airbrush illustrator for a few years. Günter studied art in the past specialising in painting and sculpting.

Eva started making bears in 1991; Gunter started about four years ago in 2002.

"Eva at this time was making classical bears like Steiff in 1910." Gunter says "so I started to make a similar one completely out of brown felt. 'Felly' was well loved by my two daughters. He is about 35 cm tall and he looks very funny."

In the past Günter's profession was advertising but soon there was a small circle of collectors for their Dufeu bears, so in 2004 both decided to become full time bear artists. Both artists are self taught and have never attended a class. They design all of their own patterns and as both are so creatively talented, make all of the outfits too.

I asked them to take me through the process." First of all we draw him, and then we sculpt the whole bear with Evaplast until all of him is in the right form. From this sculpted form we take our pattern. So we really can say all our patterns are created by us and also the outfits are all our own unique design. We don't count the hours when we make a bear, but we think 40 - 60 hours are needed to bring the soul of a new born bear into being."

Perhaps that is what makes Dufeu bears stand out so much, their soul. How they manage to create this is a part of the mystery and magic of bear making. Their bears don't seem to be new; they are beautifully aged in a way that does not look artificial. It is one thing to age a bear it is another to create a bear that feels old and looks out on the world with an old soul. The beauty of Dufeu bears is that you don't just own one, you are responsible for one of Eva and Gunter's little souls. Who could resist Gottlieb or Manfred or Sgt Pepper, all magnificent bears!

"We think our bears have their own unique expression and soul. This is what we are working for," Gunter explains. It makes

sense that most of their bears are one of a kind designs as their bears are all individuals.

"All of our bears are character bears. A lot of our bears are dressed, but we also make undressed bears. The materials we use are high quality German Schulte mohair, alpaca, blown glass eyes from Germany, excellent sewing and embroidery cotton, strong felt, leather, linen, natural wood wool, kapok and we often use vintage materials."

Sometimes they make a bear they love so much it has to stay with them. It is understandable, they are producing bears that speak to collectors, and sometimes they speak to Eva and Gunter too!

Eva and Gunter are creative people, they are full of ideas, and consequently wonderful bears are constantly being produced by them. They do not count time, they simply love what they do, and are striving with every bear they make to improve their work.

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Last year their beautiful bear 'Yoshi' was Toby Industry choice winner and was also nominated for a Golden Teddy Award.

Eva and Gunter also make dogs, and again they excel in this area, their dogs are amazingly lifelike and capture the character of their breed, an important aspect for any dog lover who might choose to immortalise their favourite pooch.

Owning a Dufeu bear is something a little special. Eva and Gunter entrust the little souls that they strive so hard to create to their collectors, and with such individual and expressive looking bears it is no surprise that Dufeu bears are in great demand.

Dufeu bears will be exhibiting at the Teddies 2006 London show in September 2006. **TBCI**



LEFT
Rilzy

RIGHT
Bull