



Lotz, a German hunt terrier

G

ermany, a country that has long exemplified old-world charm and unparalleled craftsmanship and engineering, is home to Eva and Günter Dufeu, both artists in their own right. They met in 1984 at the Graphic Atelier, a photograph and arts studio in Essen, Germany. It was love at first sight, and they married two years later.

At the time, Eva was studying graphic design and working as a professional airbrush illustrator. Günter studied painting and sculpting, but he was working as a management supervisor for an advertising agency. Within a few years, however, the duo would take their shared love for art in an entirely new direction.

In 1991 Eva began making bears, but she admits that her love for bears spans a lifetime. In fact, when she was born her parents gave her a Steiff teddy bear. "It was a whole life's love," says Eva. "I don't think my parents knew at that time that my love for teddies would last forever."

Eva's first attempt a bear making was a classic bear made completely out of brown felt and designed after a 1910 Steiff. "Felty was really well loved by my two daughters," she says. "His tail was about 35 cm, and he looked very funny. Some years later we lost him during our travels."

Günter joined his wife in her craft in 1997, and their first collaborative bear project was *Wobby*, a classical 25-inch bear dressed as a fisherman.

"From the beginning Eva made bears," explains Günter. "We spoke about new ideas, concepts, and we occasionally worked together.

I wasn't a bear artist at this time, but for sure I was a creative collecting my first experiences in this new area."

Together the self-taught artists have discovered a way to add character



Man's Best Friend

Eva and Günter Dufeu's portrait of a dog.

BY FELICIA HYMER



Moritz, a pug



Chico, a German dachshund

and love to each of their creations.

Shortly after Günter started making bears, they adopted Lotz, a German hunt terrier. Lotz passed away later that year from cancer, but his time with the Dufeu family would change them forever. It was then that the idea was born to create him as a dog with a "human touch," and in 2004, their first dressed portrait dog was created as a lasting tribute to their beloved pet. Lotz was brilliantly portrayed, and his pedigree set the bar for all of their sculpted dogs.



Today, from their home in Mühlheim, Eva and Günter spend anywhere from 30 to 100 hours on each bear or dog creation, depending on the size and complexity of the design. The sizes range between 10 to 25 inches. They like to use quality traditional materials such as Schulte mohair, mouth-blown glass eyes from Germany, leather, linen, excelsior, and wool, and they often incorporate vintage materials to create custom outfits as well. Each costume is always unique and created solely by the artists. Together they brainstorm ideas and create each work of art. "Our job positions change with each project," says Eva. "Sometimes I cut the fabric and he sculpts. Sometimes he designs the outfit and I sew it."



Rex, a German shepherd





Sam, a bearded collie

They often create soft-sculpture dogs from photos of actual dogs. "It's more than just capturing the look of a breed or a dog's personality," says Eva, "it's about looking into a dog's eyes and seeing his soul. Dogs make the best subjects. Generally, they are obedient, good souls. They're honest and trusting. They don't hide emotions as people do."

From Jack Russell terriers to collies, bulldogs to golden retrievers, there's no end to the breeds the artists can create. Over the years, the Dufeus have studied the emotions and characteristics of dogs. From the expressive eyes to sculpting the face and grooming the fur, Eva and Günter have helped to define the essence of man's best friend. ■

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Bino, a rough collie



The Dufeus with a few of their bears

Collectors can find their bears and dogs at:

Teddies of Mount Holly
Mount Holly, N.J.
www.teddiesofmtholly.com

My Friends & Me
Leesburg, Va.
Tel: 703-777-8222
www.myfriendsandme.com

Sue Pearson Dolls & Teddy Bears
Brighton, United Kingdom
www.suepearson.co.uk