



Bears and hares are a

Skills learned from her parents and through workshops combine with a love of nature and the animals found within it to inspire Jutta Michels' wonderful creations

BY JILL MUNDY

A talent or skill of any kind is something to be celebrated and treasured. First comes the pleasure of using that talent and then success follows through practice and perseverance. When that talent can be shared with friends and family, it becomes even more special.

Jutta Michels lives in Gerolstein, Germany, a little town in the countryside near Cologne. Jutta's father was



an amateur painter and it was his encouragement that sparked her love of art. "I learned from him when I was a child and we had some exhibitions together. My favourite things to paint were animals and when I was older, I studied comic drawing as part of my education."

But that is only part of the story behind mic-baerenundhasen, as Jutta explains: "My mother was a dressmak-

er and taught me how to sew. I made a lot of my own clothing!"

Creativity took a slightly different direction in 1994 when Jutta and her husband built their own house. They live there still and have two sons, aged 26 and 28, two horses, "...and the neighbour's cat!"

But the art was not put aside for long. "In 1996 I heard about a workshop, 'Teddy bear making', at the local community college and signed up. That was the moment I got the 'virus'. It was the perfect way to combine draw-



winning combination

ing and sewing! Soon I made my own patterns and turned to other animals as well as bears - first hares then a lot of other animals."

These early animals were all sewn by hand and then Jutta discovered a new skill. "I learned the technique of needle felting and I was impressed by the possibilities offered by that kind of artwork. I made needle felted animals for a while and then combined sewing and felting. I love to felt parts of the face, so every animal I make is one-of-a-kind and very individual."

When Jutta began making her bears, they ranged in size from 25-50cm. Gradually the bears became smaller and then more animals were added. Today, most are miniatures with felted faces. Jutta says: "The most important

part for me is making the face... the smile of the animal is so satisfying and motivating to get the creature finished."

Living in the countryside, it is no surprise that Jutta says her best ideas are inspired by nature. "There are so many lovely animals I want to make but the day doesn't have enough hours! I also love to buy little things intended for dolls houses and make a miniature animal that fits the character of the piece. Sometimes, when I see a special stone or piece of wood, it inspires me to make a squirrel or something like that to sit on it."

The materials Jutta chooses are natural too - her favourites are alpaca and felting wool - but she also uses mohair and synthetic fur. "Most of my creations are very natural but I also

love making little scenes with more than one animal and suitable accessories."

One of the favourite characters to be made is a dog. "Some years ago I was given an order to make a long haired sausage dog. It was a sad personal situation and the dogs' eyes had an expression to reflect that. He is one of my favourite creations."

Jutta is lucky enough to have her own studio in her home and also a small workshop where she teaches classes for up to six people. "I started to give workshops some years ago. This summer I held a one week workshop in a rented little hotel and there are workshops all through the year at my house. I love to work on my new ideas alone but also love to teach the

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workshop members. We always have a great time together."

Jutta has her own website and she also sells her animals at the larger German teddy bear exhibitions. "In the past year I have designed various limited edition animals for Ian Pout at Teddy Bears of Witney. I'm very proud to be a part of his wonderful catalogue."

Some of Jutta's bears and other ani-

mals have won awards over the years but despite that, she has sold everything she has made, apart from one: "I have kept the very first bear I made at the community college. He was the start of my career as an artist (my first career was as a biological technical assistant). I intend to carry on making my animals and also teaching the workshops - combining two things that I love is just perfect."