



Thirty years on Jutta

This issue we chat with the wonderful Jutta Michels of Mic Bären & Hasen and discover how she started on a career in bear making thirty years ago

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MEET THE ARTIST



still loves creating

Hi Jutta, tell us where did the idea come from for your trading name?

The name is assembled by the first three letters of my name (mic from Michels) and bears and hares, be-

cause I started my career with these two animals.

Where do you live? I live in Gerolstein, a small town in West Germany

close to the border of Belgium in the countryside.

Why did you start making bears? In 1996 I took part in a workshop for

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teddy bear making at our local community college, which is where I got the “virus”. Before, I had painted for some years, especially animals. This I learned from my father who was an amateur painter. I also studied comic drawing. I also learned sewing from my mother who was a dressmaker, Combining these skills gave me a good start as a plush animal creator.

Were you a collector before you tried making bears? When I was a child I did not play with dolls, but only with plush animals and I had some from the German brand Steiff. I spent all my pocket money on these pieces. As an adult I stopped collecting, but now I sometimes buy a piece from a colleague I appreciate.

Are you a full or part-time bear maker? Yes I am a full-time teddybear maker.

Do you recall your first design? The

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first bear I made was in that college workshop. He was 25 cm and made of very short grey mohair.

How much have your bears changed since then? From then on I tried some other patterns in different sizes. But soon I wanted to make my own designs and not only bears but also other animals, starting with hares. The former painting and sewing skills helped me a lot, creating my own style.

Describe the bears you make. The size range is from 7 to 30 cm, but most between 10 and 20 cm. My designs are often close to nature, but sometimes they are dressed and come with typical accessories. Sometimes I arrange them in small groups to create a scene or special theme.

What are your favourite materials to use? I use mohair, alpaca and synthetic plush, and sheep wool for the felted parts of the face or hands and legs; it is



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always dependent on the animal I want to make. For the nose, horns, antlers, hooves or beaks I use modelling clay. The animals are finished with painting some details, especially in the face.

Where do you get the inspiration for your designs now? The best ideas come from nature, but also sometimes from tiny things I find in stores and turn out to be suitable as accessories. I also go with the seasons, which means in spring I make more hares, chicken and ducks; in summer it's maritime themes or bears with flowers or butterflies. In autumn there are more squirrels and in winter a lot of Christmas creatures.

Is there anything that you would still like to try or master? The world is full

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of beautiful animals, so there are a lot I did not make up to now.

Where do you sell your bears? I have my own website and I also sell via Facebook and Whats App. I take part in the larger teddy bear exhibitions in Germany such as Teddybear Total every year in Münster. I also took part in the online show — Hugglets Christmas Extravaganza — which was a great success for me.

Which bear are you most proud of? There is no special bear or animal I am the most proud of. In my work the progress always starts with the face and when it looks to me in a friendly way, that makes me so happy every time and inspires me to go on.

Have any of your bears won an award? I have won a lot of awards (Golden George, European Championship, Swiss Teddy, Moscow Diamond Bear Award, Excellence in Bear Artistry Award). For the past eight years I haven't participated in competitions because I think now is the time for newcomers. But in 2024 I was asked to be a judge in the Golden George competition. This was a great honour and at the same time a nice conclusion to my competition career.

Do you have any bears that you have been unable to part with? The very first bear I made is still with me and will never be sold. He was my career starter and he is worth everything, not because he is perfectly made - this he

isn't, not at all - but with him began a new a new age of a fulfilling life. I am very grateful for that.

What are your plans for the future? Doing whatever I want to do. I stopped working to order and decided to work only on my own ideas. Working without pressure leads to the best results. I enjoy this very much.

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