From Boredom to Bear-Making
Bry Richardson – Thingumy & Co

by Pam North

 Feeling unwell is a misfortune never wished for, but it surprisingly sometimes spawns unforeseen fortunate results. Bry Richardson, of Thingumy & Co, cites just such a case as the springboard for what has evolved into the creation of her adorably droll, personality-plus bears.
 “I got started with my bears some 18 years ago, when ill health forced me to stop working.” she explained. “I always have been creative, and the boredom of enforced laziness made me search for something I could do to amuse myself. I long had been a vintage bear collector, loving all kinds of teddies. At that time the internet was still quite new, but I joined a few chat rooms that were bear-related. A local news agent carried some foreign bear magazines from Germany, and, of course, the USA's *Teddy Bear & Friends*. I had never heard of artist bears before, and it was amazing to see all the wonderful variations on the teddy theme. Inspired, I soon had a go at making a mohair bear, and it was extremely wonky if I remember rightly. Because I didn't know how to set eyes properly, or sew a good nose, it generally was more of a Frankenstein bear! I think my daughter ended up having him, and I know my mother got a fair few of my trial-and-error first designs. My attitude is to never give up, and so I persevered. I learned early that I needed to design my own patterns, which was easier for me compared to getting ears straight, eyes level, and noses just so! I would look for alternatives, like clay noses or suede noses. There is no substitute for continuing to learn. Just practice, practice, practice! I still hate doing ears, though; I never can get them straight the first time, but I have learned that being a millimeter off here and there is not the end of the world. What's important is for a bear to be well-sewn together and structurally sound. I continually strive to be a better artist, and I'm always thinking up new designs, and changing my whole catalog every so often. New ideas lurking in my subconscious leap up when I least expect it.”
 Design is a major part of any creative endeavor, and Bry had to learn the basics. “When I started designing my own mohair bears, I spent a lot of time reading about the design process, and to this day I still follow the methods I learned from those books. I love different and quirky things that make me smile, so I try to incorporate those qualities into my work. I initially made larger bears that had their own unique, laid-back style; however, I soon realized that my heart lay with mini-bears. Over the years my bears have gotten smaller, and it's rare now that I ever make anything over 4 inches tall.”
 All artists have to find the materials that work best with their vision, and Bry was no exception. “I now use a large and varied group of fabrics, from traditional mohairs and vintage upholstery fabrics to the beautiful, hand-dyed Red Heart Boutique Sassy Fabrics, to cashmere and viscose. I recently started making a new range of bears called Stargazey Bears, in three sizes so far, from 1.5” to 4”. I have expanded my animal range to include dragons, pigs, and mice. I currently am getting a big kick out of making the dragons, as I love all the fiddly finishing bits they require, including embroidering the wings, spine, and tummy inserts, and hand-applying accent gems. I even get down and dirty with clay to make the horns! I have made a few larger bears recently, but they are still few and far between, and I also have created little lantern fairies, which were a big hit at a recent show.”
 Bry described her life in Great Britain: “ I currently live in rural Lincolnshire with my husband of 27 years, our youngest son and his girlfriend, three gorgeous Chihuahuas, and four rescued hens. Our house is a wonderful Victorian pile in the middle of a small village, where we have been for 15 years. I love living here, as I am truly happy only in a more rural setting, and the village is so small that we are never more than a two-minute walk from open countryside.”
 When asked what she most enjoyed about her craft, Bry replied, “ I love making bears from home, and satisfying my creative cravings. What gives me the most pleasure is seeing people smile. One of my most loyal customers once said that if she was ever feeling low, she would look at some of my bears, and they would make her smile. That makes it all worthwhile.”

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