

When I first saw Kim Russell's bears one word was on my lips. Kim, being the reticent artistic type was, of course proud of her work, but like so many artists was not sure if it was the 'type' of work I was looking for.

What I was looking for? I always look for superb quality, for artistic merit, for fabulous design and of course for the emergence of the bear as a complete character. Not only did Kim's bears tick every single box, that word that sprung to mind took them into a whole other realm, spectacular. That is exactly what I thought looking at them, and then when the images arrived for this article, it just got worse. They were not just spectacular, they were amazing!

Making amazing

Kim has been making bears for quite some time, in reality she made her first bear when she was just seventeen years old. "My mum taught me to sew from an early age," she explains, "so when I discovered artist bears it really was a simple transition and all my childhood creativity came flooding back after many years of lying dormant."

This easy transition was from dressmaking! "I am a dressmaker by trade," she says and all of a sudden the complexity of her patterns, the superb cut of the characters makes sense!

"I have always loved art" she admits, "as a child I would always be drawing or sculpting things out of plastercine. My hands were never still, they were always creating something. As I got older the quirky little characters I used to create faded away with my childhood and an interest in sewing took over."

In discovering artist bears, Kim was able to combine the two loves of her life and to let her imagination run riot with her designs.

Teddy tree

Kim has always loved bears and it was when she discovered artist bears that she really managed to find something that would change her life. At the first show she attended she discovered a shop called the Teddy Tree and there she signed up for a class in bear making. "I haven't stopped since" she laughs.

"I love to create" she says, "and in the bears and critters I have found an avenue where I can express myself. Basically it makes me happy and I love the process of putting a few basic ideas together and not really knowing what I am going to end up with. Every piece I create is always a surprise for me as I like to push my boundaries all the time."

I think this is what makes Kim's bears so exciting. An artist who just loves to be pushed, who keeps pushing and as yet has not found any boundaries to limit her.

She is giving free reign to her ideas, to her imagination, unlocking her childhood friends, her joy and excitement at creating and allowing all of us lucky collectors to join in with her.

Different from the start

Kim's work has always been original and significantly different from anything else. Her determination to learn and her curiosity has ensured that she is never bored with her work, never wondering what will come next, rather she is thrilled at what she is doing and takes every creature as a creative adventure. It is exciting to see artists work in this way, and of course rewarding as it produces some remarkable results.

"I learned the basic sils from workshops presented by more experienced local artists" Kim says, "and then progressed to more technique orientated workshops, like working with real fur, pattern making and needle felting. As I got more confident with my skills I began to experiment with different designs and my childhood passion for drawing and sculpting came flooding back out of nowhere! All I wanted to do was make bears!"

Diving ambition

Passion and drive in bear making are essential ingredients, they help make the magic and bring inanimate objects to life.

Of course even a talented artist like Kim had to start somewhere and all those workshops paid off with giving her the confidence to produce the kind of bears she wanted, and even from the beginning her look was unique.

"My first bears were quite basic to look at" she says, "but I did want to



Far left: Fergus
Left: Solomon
Above: Kim Russell and Buster
Below: Bosley
Below right: Brandon

