

Face Time



Bear shows are meeting grounds for collectors, creators

By Stephanie Finnegan

Most teddy bear collectors are social — they love to admire members of each other’s “hugs,” chat with fellow fans and favorite artists, and generally socializing with like-minded folks. But spread out across the world as they are, many arctophiles tend to “hibernate” — staying in their own cozy, private dens and participating in their collecting hobby via social media posts and emails. But there’s even more fun and camaraderie awaiting collectors who are willing to step out of their comfort zones and attend a show.

Teddy Bear & Friends had the distinct pleasure of chatting with an incredible panel of show promoters who are also collectors, artists, bear boosters, and downright sociable and likable people. There are teddy bear shows and conventions located across the country and across the calendar. Whether an event is large or small, spanning several days or just a few hours on a Saturday or Sunday, it makes perfect sense for a teddy bear fan to get up, go out, and grab the opportunity to see unique show specials, exciting planned events, and mingle with other ursine fanciers. It’s all about showing up and reaching out.

Triple the Fun

Donna Nielsen of Cookie’s Critters has been a teddy bear artist for more than 20 years. She brings her 24 years of artistic experience to her role as organizer of three top-notch teddy bear shows: the Bears are Blooming Teddy Bear Artist Open House held March 24 in Timonium, Md.; Bears Near Bristol Teddy

Bear Artist Open House in Farmington, Ct. coming up Sept. 29; and the Hunt Valley Holiday Teddy Bear Show & Sale Nov. 11, in Hunt Valley, Md.

Each of these annual events draws a stellar array of award-winning artists and exhibitors and offer free admission to the public. “Our shows include many artists who have been creating bears for upward of 20 to 30 years. There are also newcomers present — not always new to the industry, but new to the show. Collectors do like to see new faces, as well as the artists they have been collecting from for years!” Nielsen said.

The chance to make personal connections between fans and artists is one of the main advantages of attending a show. Not only can a collector meet a favorite artist in person, they have the chance to see amazing artist-made teddy bears and “friends” in the fur rather than just magazine photos or web images.

“Collectors can touch, feel, and see the quality of the bears and critters. They can find a face that talks to them! Collectors who have never attended a show would be in awe of how many bears they see,” Nielsen said. “Each bear is different, and each one is its own unique self. The bears at our shows have all been created with love by an artist’s hand. It’s an amazing opportunity to talk to the artists, and in many cases, lifelong friendships can be established!”

Find out more at <https://teddybearartistco-opshows.weebly.com> or email tdybrshowinfo@gmail.com



Can't Beat That Feeling

Kay Schrader is the show coordinator of the annual Missoula Doll, Toy, Teddy Bear, and Miniature Show and Sale held on the first Saturday in June in Missoula, Mont. Door prizes and raffles are the order of the day at this show, as well.

"Nothing compares to going to doll and bear events. Actually seeing and touching plush items adds so much to the experience of shopping. Sellers are willing to talk to you about the history and sometimes the provenance of an item. Even if you don't end up taking it home with you, you leave a more knowledgeable collector," Schrader said. "Learning about things you personally don't collect introduces you to new items, artists, manufacturers, styles, materials, and more. Caution! Your collecting might expand to new categories that you never considered before!"

Schrader is a collector herself and knows firsthand how much fun it can be to talk about a rare discovery and a long-sought-after purchase. "When you're passionate about something, it tends to rub off on other people. I love talking about and then showing my collection. Whenever I have the opportunity, I invite people to come to a club meeting, go to a show, attend a convention, go see an exhibit, or meet me somewhere to just sit and talk.

"Online shopping, posts, text, even phone calls and long e-mails? Sure, I do that, too, but none of these provide the joy of physically being with people and attending these events. Learning about collection documentation, repair and conservation, getting new ideas for display and accessories, all of this enhances your collecting experience and adds to the joy of it. Sometimes people you meet at these events result in lifelong friendships, and you discover dolls and bears are not your only common interests."

Find out more at www.bitterrootbabies.com/MissoulaDollShow.html or email schrader1501@blackfoot.net

Above: A Steiff exhibit at the Missoula Doll, Toy, Teddy Bear, and Miniature Show and Sale. (Photo courtesy of Julie King)

Below: Steampunk outfits worn by a spouse and six artists at the Quinlan Artist Doll & Teddy Bear Convention. From left: Sean Eveslage, Tami Eveslage, Elizabeth Taylor, Michelle Lamb, Katherine Hallam, Martha Burch, and Francisco Carreno.





Above: TBAI attendees are encouraged to get to know one another beyond their affection for teddy bears. Group tours to local landmarks help to build those bonds.

Left: This pair of bears by Lori Simon take center stage at a Crossroads Doll & Teddy Bear Show.



“There are amazing pictures of bears and critters all over the Internet. When you enter a show, bears seem to light up the room and make us smile. Everyone enjoys talking to the artist or listening to an expert who fills the room with stories and laughter. That’s what teddy bears and their friends bring to shows,” Drake said. “Also, a collector connects with a face by looking at it, but she bonds with a bear by holding it!”

Find out more at dolls4all.com

A Bear Lovers’ Reunion

Entering its 24th year, the Teddy Bear Artist Invitational (TBAI) has been likened to a family reunion. Whether an artist or a collector has attended for years or is arriving for the first time, the show’s warm vibe is evident. Held in upstate New York Aug. 16-18, the event is packed with excursions, parties, workshops, gallery shows, and sales. A portion of the sales revenue from the gallery is earmarked as a charitable donation for endangered-species programs around the globe.

“Our artists are required to create a one-of-a-kind (OOAK) piece for the gallery based on the year’s theme. The collectors have the first opportunity to purchase these spectacular pieces. In addition to that, we have a few pieces that are generously donated to be auctioned, and there are raffle pieces that are only available at the show,” show promoter and artist Cindy Malchoff said.

The artist behind *My Apple Tree*, Malchoff is a tireless advocate for the importance of belonging to a teddy bear movement. She knows that attending a convention or a show helps to forge bonds that link artists, collectors, and dealers together.

“The fun begins starting Thursday evening with our themed meet-and-greet,” Malchoff said. On Friday morning, we offer workshops, presentations, or a tour of a local attraction at no additional cost to the attendees. Friday afternoon, we hold games to keep the collectors interacting with one another. Each day there is a raffle. In the evening, we have our most enjoyed event: the preview of the OOAK gallery.”

Collectors vote for their favorite gallery pieces, and the winners are announced after the Friday night banquet. Saturday morning, before the public show and sale kicks off, there is a breakfast where *Teddy Bear & Friends* magazine presents the TOBY Public’s Choice awards. “We finish with a casual picnic-style dinner, where we share stories about the show’s highlights, and we begin planning for next year’s events!” Malchoff said.

Find out more at <http://tbai.org> or email info@tbai.org

West Coast Wonders

For more than 20 years, Dorothy Drake has presided over the Crossroads Doll & Teddy Bear Shows. With nine shows held annually in California, Washington, and Oregon, each event spotlights teddy bears and soft-sculpture artwork in all their glory.

“Teddy bears are not something to be admired from afar,” Drake said. “They are meant to be up close and personal. People tell me that a bear ‘talks’ to them with its expression. Because of this, shows are very important.”

At a Crossroads show, attendees are in for a large amount of personalized fun. World-renowned artists participate, showcasing their unique handiwork. John Paul Port, a leading authority on the history of the teddy bear, is a frequent guest and offers free, informal appraisals to attendees. Likewise, well-informed experts will lecture show-goers on the history and social significance of the teddy bear. Artists conduct workshops and are always seminars and hands-on activities to make the experience more memorable for the collector.

Philadelphia Freedom

The Quinlan Artist Doll & Teddy Bear Convention & Show has been held annually in Philadelphia since 2011. This year's show runs April 12-14, with the Saturday show and sale open to the public. Susan and Terry Quinlan are well aware how easy it is for collectors to stay home. To combat the Internet-inspired inertia, the Quinlans stage conventions with special themes, guests, and offerings that cannot be found elsewhere.

"We offer collectors the chance to meet artists and see dolls and bears that are not readily found online. Every sales table offers artist dolls or artist bears, whereas most shows only have a handful of artists," Terry Quinlan said. "We have OOAK doll and bear themes to motivate the artists to think outside the box, to try entirely new designs, materials, and techniques, in order to enter new and broader markets for their creations."

"We are always experimenting with new activities to work toward organizing the best convention available anywhere. Each year, Good Bears of the World conducts a charity silent auction to raise funds for teddy bears to be given away to bring comfort to children going through traumatic experiences," Quinlan said. "At the convention, they also donate cases of teddy bears to the local police or fire department to be passed on to children needing a pal during stressful and emotional times."

"For shows and conventions to compete with online shows and sales, show organizers have to stop doing the same old thing. Growth and progress is based on innovation, taking risks and staying the course. They need to rethink the purpose of their event, how they treat the artists, best location for the event, economics to attendees, types and amount of things for sale, hotel staff service if meals are served, and sponsors to subsidize the cost of the event," Quinlan said. "And promoters need to ask themselves if the program is of interest to the artists, collectors, spouses, children, and those who do not currently collect dolls or bears."

Quinlan has a soft spot for the children who accompany their parents or grandparents to his event — these kids might grow up to be collectors one day, too. "One of my personal favorite things is to go around and give little children a Buddy Bear, a 4-inch golden-brown bear with jointed arms and legs. Adults have offered to buy them, but they are only for children."

The Quinlans' show is a favorite for families and attendees of all ages. "We have had our nieces and our nephews wear their Winnie the Pooh and Raggedy Ann and Andy costumes to greet the show attendees and for photo shoots with children and adults," Quinlan said. "Show organizers need to offer things that are fun for kids, and collectors need to take kids to conventions where there are activities that interest kids — things not available from online shopping. Organizers need to think outside the box — for example, apps of interest to kids that they can experience only at the show and are unaware they exist, competitive games on cell phones with a prize for the winner. Conventions and shows need to become fun for all." 🐾

Find out more at quinlanmuseum.com or email terry@quinlanmuseum.com

Below: Simone and Claudia Bleeker traveled from Germany to attend one of Donna Nielsen's shows.

