

Collectable creations at the Quinlan Teddy Bear Show

The Artist Doll & Teddy Bear Convention put on by Susan and Terence Quinlan was the place to be, for both artists and collectors

BY BRITA MOORE



Walking into the room on the first night of the Artist Doll & Teddy Bear Convention, the excitement among the attendees was palpable. Artists and collectors bustled about, looking on with awe at the stunning teddy bears and dolls on display. As a few put it: "It was like the good old days."

The Convention is run by Susan and Terence Quinlan of the Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum & Library, and this year was the sixth rendition. It was held at the Clarion Hotel in Essington, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia, from 29 April - 1 May. As always, the spotlight was on the teddy bear and doll artists, of whom there were 128, from all over the United States and around the world. No large vendors were permitted to sell there. Just one look at the galleries and sales tables told you the calibre and authenticity of the artists. Meals were all-inclusive and each one featured a delicious buffet.

The show provided a magnificent experience for artists and collectors alike.

The Quinlans kicked off the show with an array of workshops on teddy bear and doll artistry, with the finished pieces on display in the late afternoon. Students worked on noses, eyes and felt work. The opening afternoon also featured a special presentation from Good Bears of the World to the Tincum County Police Department, donating 50 bears to comfort children

in times of trouble. GBW Chairperson Terrie Strong was around for the entire weekend, sharing the organisation's noble mission.

As attendees arrived, those new to the convention visited the Boot Camp session with Terry and Susan Quinlan. They explained the different aspects of the show, emphasising how full a weekend it really is. From breakfast until late at night, it's a bustle of classes and sales, with breaks to eat at the buffets. They also introduced the 'Blue Crew', a group who wore blue shirts and were assisting in making sure the weekend went smoothly.

Once the workshops and Boot Camp had come to their close, artists set up their finest creations for the Signature Piece Doll & Teddy Bear Sale. Attendees were so awed by the work



they saw, while they shared drinks and good conversation with one another. This reverence for artistry was the high point of the weekend, with the Signature Creations almost completely sold out by the end of the first night.

Saturday kicked off with a marketplace for artists and collectors to buy whatever they needed, while many expressed their enthusiasm about Teddy Bear Times. Then it was onto another gallery, this one divided into unique themes: heroes/role models, bride/groom, Star Wars characters, military figures, comic book characters and hand painted bears and dolls. We found a Rainbow bear by Michelle Lamb and Charlie Brown by Sandy Czaja, to name a couple. All were for sale, in front of these dedicated collectors' eyes. Terry Quinlan suggested at the opening of the show that these kinds of galleries may help foster interest in younger collectors.

Then it was time for more inspiring workshops, with bear-aerobics breaks in between. In Joanne Livingston's 'Making It Real' seminar, the artist of Desertmountainbear discussed her motivation for making realistic bears. She creates directly from what she sees in nature and showed examples of bears she's modelled hers after, which got lots of oohs and ahhs. She encouraged artists to play with their bears, to help inspire collectors to play too.

Another key presentation was



'Teddy Bear Collectors: A Vanishing Breed?' from an avid collector from California, Mark Allen. He expressed concern about a dwindling number of teddy bear collectors and suggested several factors are turning off potential collectors. But he also included ideas for improving the outlook.

The main idea to help grow the hobby? Promote artist bears as contemporary art. The attendees of the presentation took on a lively discussion of what this would mean. We left feeling hopeful and even more inspired by the creativity of teddy bear artists.

Sunday's sale day brought out many

collectors enthusiastic to meet all of the bears up close. Impressive displays filled the ballrooms, from steampunk to mice sleeping in clocks. We smiled at Sue VanNattan's lovely nature display of her Bearlooms bears. Collectors got the incomparable experience of enjoying hundreds of artist bears face-to-face, and many walked away with bags full of them. Plus, teddy bear artists JoAnne O'Hanlon, Joanne Livingston, Michelle Lamb, Katherine Hallam, Diana Watts and Svetlana Khabarova walked away with the convention awards.

As long as shows like the Quinlans'

promote the talents of teddy bear artists like this and send collectors away with full hugs, there's a bright future ahead for our hobby.

Plans are currently underway for next year's convention. For more details, see www.quinlanmuseum.com/convention.html



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