

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF MAGIC: Collectible bonus poster inside!

**Teddy  
Bear  
Review**

# Teddy Bear Review

## 20 Candles and Counting

Join the Teddy Party!

**VIP** Guests:

Deb Canham  
Judy Eppolito  
Irene Heckel  
Jackie Melerski

And  
Many  
More...

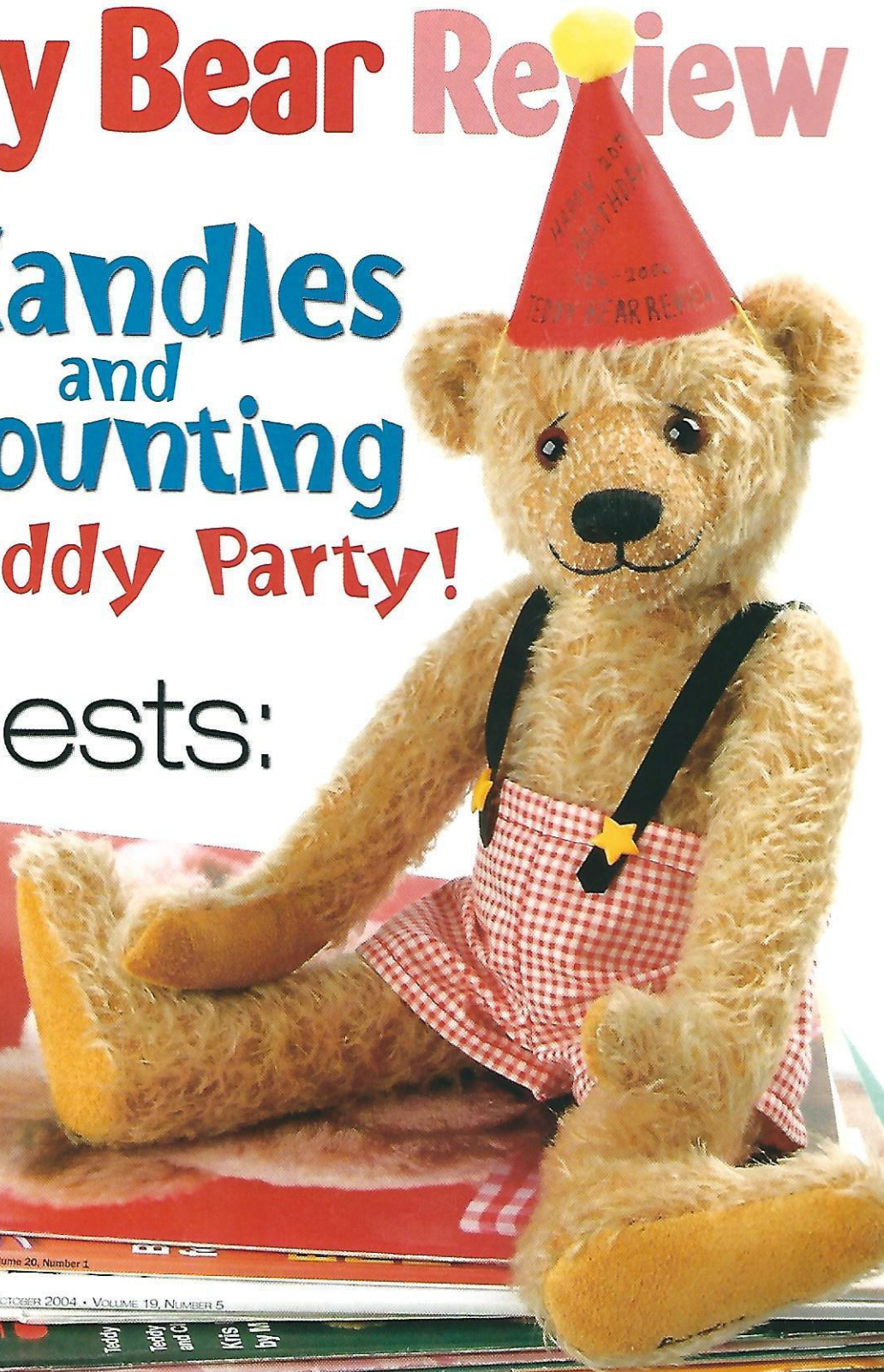
October 2006  
USA \$5.99 CANADA \$6.99



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Bev White's  
**"TBR Birthday Bear"**

Win the artist original!



# Two Decades of Diversity, 1986 to 2006

**M**y name is Irene Heckel, and after 20 years as a teddy bear artist, I find it hard to imagine a life without them. Teddies, however, only became a large part of my life in my "adult" years. I began to take notice of teddy bears again when I was in my mid-20s. I had attended doll shows for a few years, looking for vintage Barbies and other older dolls I remembered from my childhood. I began to see more and more teddy bears at these events and I felt myself drawn to them, particularly the beautiful mohair teddies that Steiff made. I also began seeing a few handmade "artist" bears. At the time I did not realize that bear artists were just beginning to be recog-



nized for their unique designs and that actually the age of the artist bear had just begun in 1934. I loved these bears, even more as an adult than as a child, but I could not afford to buy as many as I would have liked. So, having extensive experience with many varied arts and crafts, including embroidery, I decided that I would try and make my own teddy. Perhaps this would help me get through my "bear fever" and I would find that this was a passing fancy. Little did I know I was opening a new world—not only did I like the bear, but I actually liked making him. (I had found a commercial pattern and modified the face to suit

my taste.) Before I knew it, I was designing my own patterns, and even making the bears out of—gasp!—mohair. When I did my first doll-and-teddy-bear show, I sold six bears. I was so excited! I couldn't believe that people actually liked what I did.



Heckel's bears often tilt their heads; this subtle angle engages the collector.



My designing was growing along with my business and I began to implement new ideas. I began by jointing the heads of the bears at an angle, so when they were turned, they tended to look at you with a curious expression. A few years later, I was one of the first artists to experiment with airbrushing and I found that it added something "extra" to the bears' facial expression, like makeup on a person. Since 2002, it has been needle felting that has added something new to the art of the teddy bear. I can remember being at the 2003 Toy Fair and having people stop in amazement to see how it was done. It was relatively new to the bear world and I was happy to be instrumental in its beginning.

The bear world has changed in many ways over the past years. The collectors are varied in ages and tastes and come from a broad spectrum of lifestyles. They are a bit more educated and sophisticated on quality and materials.

All teddy bears are wonderful and deserve the hug of a human friend, but for me there is still something special about that beautiful, huggable piece of art that makes it an irresistible part of my life.

*Irene Heckel* [www.ireneheckelbears.com](http://www.ireneheckelbears.com)

The artist began her career in 1986, initially fashioning a bruin adapted from a pattern. With variations and innovations, her art has grown to embody unique traits.