



Bunnies, Mice, And All Things Nice

Laura Statham went from being a social worker in the UK to creating needle felted creatures in rural Ireland. Here, she tells us how she has changed as her life has, and how going with the flow is the way to go...



I moved to rural Ireland from the UK where I worked as a social worker in mental health. Continuing my career in social work in Ireland meant long commutes or working in fields other than mental health, neither of which attracted me.

I found myself out of the nine to five buzz with children to look after and another one on the way. Being a stay at home mum was driving me crazy; I needed something to occupy my mind and time other than cooking, cleaning, and all that jazz that comes with being at home with children. Then, I discovered Pinterest, and came across the most beautiful handmade animals, fairies, and other wonderful creations, all made from wool. I did a bit of investigating and discovered a whole new world of needle felting. So, I just went ahead and bought myself some wool and needles and gave it a go.

I was pretty much hooked from that first arrival of wool. I just made what I liked and things that had previously caught my eye. The first things I made were mushrooms; the classic red amanita with white spots, and a gnome. I gave my mum the gnome as a gift, but I don't think she was very impressed as she put it on display very briefly, for it then to disappear out of sight forevermore. I made a hare next, and a fox that I had posed to be elegantly looking over its shoulder. I look at that fox now though, and think it more resembles an animal who has been possessed by some head twisting demonic force!

I carried on felting as a hobby and found myself a part time job. During my lunch break one day, I strolled into a Etain Hickey's in Clonakilty where hares in different mediums were displayed all around. Etain is a ceramicist herself and uses the back space of her shop as a gallery. After noticing the hares in the shop, I thought she might appreciate the one I'd made. Well, she did, and suggested putting it into an upcoming exhibition.

It sold, and although I was a little sad to see it go, I was delighted and so proud; I actually still have the receipt from the sale tucked away somewhere.

I guess that did plant a seed in me and from there, I kept on felting. It was never really for money as I was so painfully slow. I did sell my pieces though, and with each piece I improved a little. The second hare I made went off to America which felt like a big deal, although, before the sale was complete, the prospective buyer told me the head was too small and requested I

make it bigger. I thought it was perfect as I had spent so much time making it just right. I did as she asked, and in time I learnt that improvement is a process. I couldn't even see that it had a small head! I have perspective now that has only come with putting the hours in.

I think you have to want to improve to get better. I find it hard looking back at previous work as I am so critical. I want to

hold a clinic and give them all makeovers! I want each piece I make to be an improvement on the last; for me, that's the challenge. It's easy to just churn out work, but if you get caught up in that conveyor belt of being a one-woman production line, it takes away the enjoyment and the art in the craft.

Apart from when I started out and learnt the basics, which I think involved

watching a few online videos, I don't often turn to tutorials and books for guidance and tend to just go for it and learn by way of trial and error. When I'm relaxed, I can feel like I'm on fire; when I'm trying too hard, I can get so lost in the piece and can be found looking tortured at strands of wool until the early hours, having completely lost perspective and my mind!

I try to go with the flow and make

what I feel like making. I find it a lot more enjoyable to work in this way and be inspired by what is around me. I live in a beautiful place and can see rolling fields and mountains from my window, and I'm sure this has had some influence on me, even if this is only to give me the mental space to think creatively. The company of my daughter, who loves kittens and unicorns and all things pink, has also

had some influence on me. I think I have softened as I've got older; I've changed as my life has. I don't think dashing around the city from one appointment to another gave me much time to think about making bunnies!

Now, however, I do make bunnies and mice and all things nice, and I'm in love with that part of my life. I guess the one drawback with making unique pieces >>



is the time it involves getting them 'out there' to market, so to speak. Nowadays, everything needs to go up online. This all takes time and I'm still learning how to be more efficient at this process. I've just built my own website which was an accomplishment, and hopefully that will make things more streamlined for me. I'm excited about being able to have full control over the whole process, from making an item to posting it off to its new home.

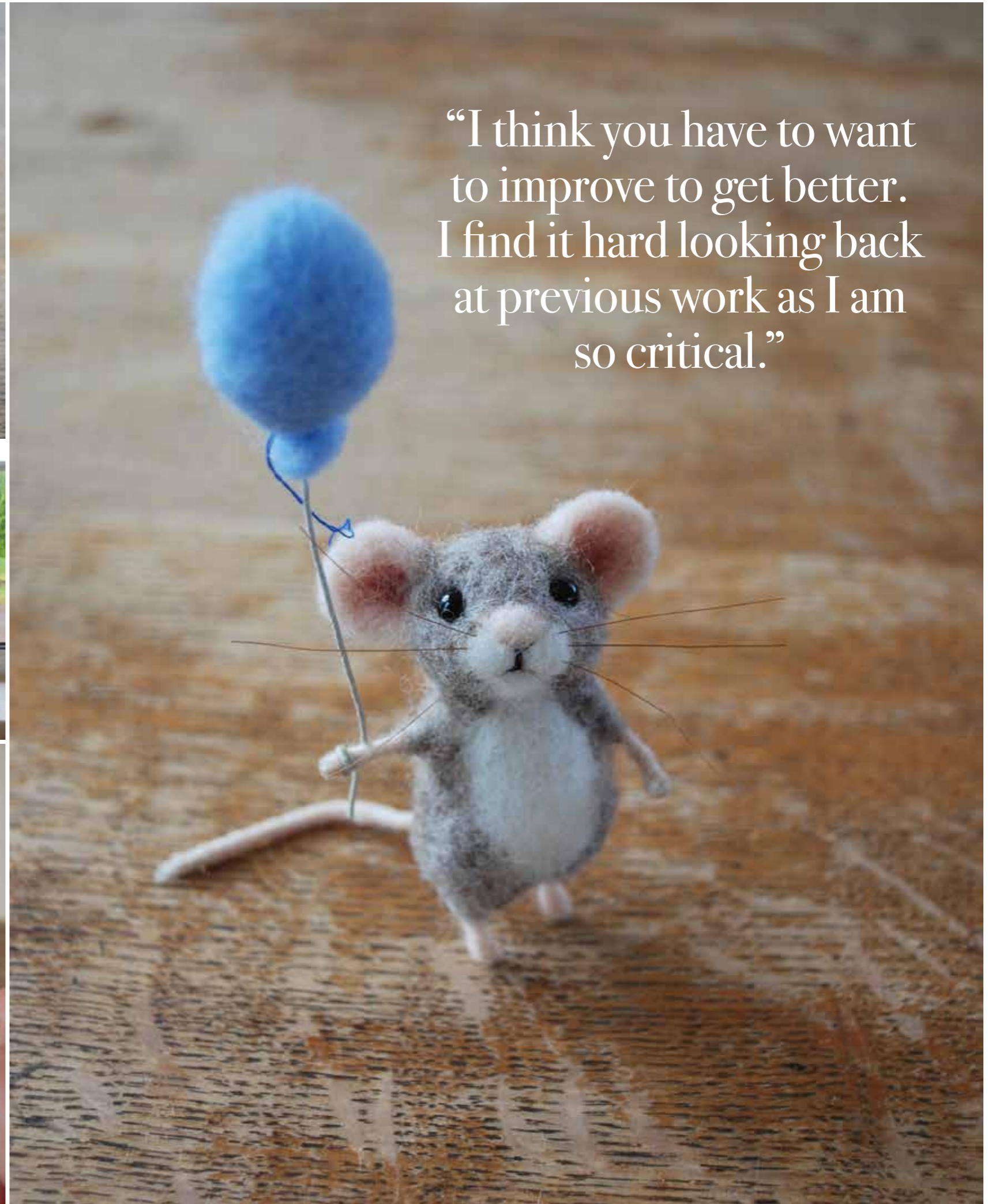
I do use social media but I have an awkward relationship with it. I have found it very useful in getting my work out to the public and I have been asked to do demonstrations and workshops, purely through being found on social media. The online community of both artists and admirers is unbelievably supportive. My partner, Gearoid, is also very supportive, and has an excellent eye for detail and proportion and is my most constructive critic.

Other artists have been so willing to give me advice and support; Declan O'Meara, a Cork-based artist, pushed me early on and others have given me helpful nuggets of advice that have stayed with me. A friend of mine, Linda (an Instagram whizz!) who has been an amazing support from the start, regularly tells me I should post process shots, interact more, and write personal posts and stories. I know she is probably right, but I tend to post only one shot of a completed piece and let it speak for itself.

PR and marketing are not my forte and I'm just not comfortable with constantly opening up about my life and pushing my work. I know what will be popular, and of course it feels good to get the positive feedback from social media, but you can get caught up in this cycle and forget what path you were on. So, I think you have to ground yourself every now and then and step back from that cycle and focus in on yourself.

For me, the need to create is very strong and it's my happy place. If I am not needle felting, I am usually making something else. I'm still drawn to natural materials and sculpture and recently I made a driftwood sea horse and I'm currently working on a horse's head. Going forward, I will always try new things, evolve, and be open to whatever comes my way. I'm very lucky to be able to make my life all about creating so I will continue for as long as I can. 🐿️

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