

STEFANIE EHRENFRIED

# FIGURATIVE FELT SCULPTURES



Stefanie Ehrenfried is a freelance artist and sculptor based in the south of Germany. Born in 1967 in Neckarsulm, she studied painting at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart after leaving school. Since 2009, she has exhibited felt sculptures in solo and group exhibitions in Germany.

>>

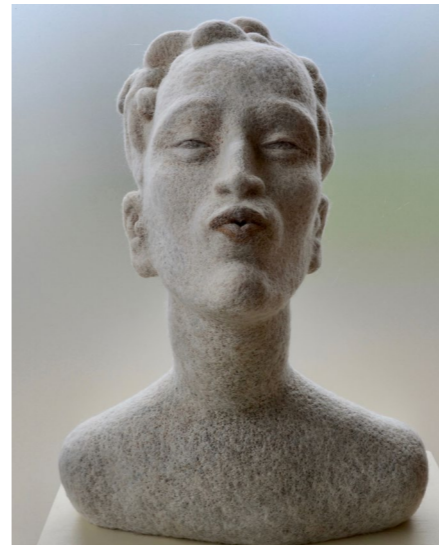
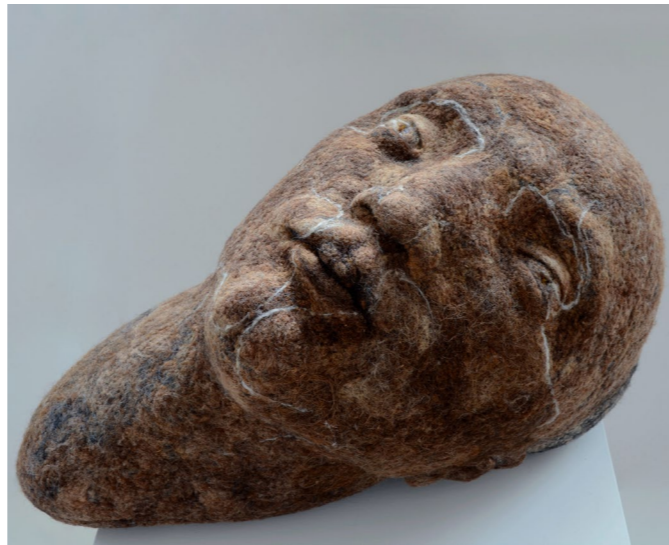
▼ Photo of the artist by Martin Aldinger

▼ *Protector*, 2011/2013, 55 x 38 x 70 cm, needle-felted sheep's wool.

▼ *Turn*, 2010, 38 x 25 x 28 cm, needle-felted sheep's wool.

▼ *Sudden Turning*, 2012, 85 x 80 x 47 cm, needle-felted sheep's wool.

▼ *Housing*, 2008-2023, 250 x 170 x 170 cm, needle-felted sheep's wool.



▲ Detail of *Housing*, 2008-2023

▲ *Course Sensor*, 2015, 100 x 70 x 40 cm, needle-felted sheep's wool.

▲ *Dreamer*, 2011, 50 x 44 x 75 cm, needle-felted sheep's wool.

▲ *Fountain*, 2013/2023, 57 x 43 x 30 cm, needle-felted sheep's wool.

▲ *Large Berry*, 2012/2017, 55 x 70 x 120 cm, needle-felted sheep's wool.

In 1991, I left the two-dimensional picture surface to work sculpturally and to explore space performatively. I became part of an experimental dance theatre group, and designed costumes and objects for the stage plays. In 1993, after the birth of our first child (two more followed in the coming years), I was making small objects and environments, and looking for new materials that would convey a maternal, nourishing, enveloping and lively warmth, such as beeswax, oil and earth, copper shim and sheep's wool. A friend gave me a book about traditional felting, such as wet-felted carpets, garments, and yurts from Mongolia and Turkmenistan. What I saw struck me directly in the soul with its strong, warm, archaic power, and I felt that it had a really great potential as a sculptural material.

Inspired by Turkish shepherd's cloaks, that look less like a piece of clothing than a kind of tent or housing, I started making object-like pieces of clothing: floor-length capes designed to give the wearer a noticeable special power and dignity. Later, through the discovery of the felting needle, I began making small figurines, and then faces and heads. Initially, they were loosely felted and sketch-like, but as time went on, I condensed and contoured my works more and more. I started using large, 25-cm-long upholstery needles and strong yarn to create a solid core made of sheep's fleece, before beginning to shape with felting needles. This allowed me to create large-scale, almost monumental objects. For good stability, I need strong wool with a high proportion of guard hairs which I obtain from local sheep farmers. For the

inner core I use Skudden and Schnucken and, on the outside, thin layers of carded fleece, including Karakul and Gotland.

My artistically valid work of felt sculptures began in 2008, and since 2009, I have been represented by Galerie Cyprian Brenner in Niederalfingen. *Housing*, a small tent-like building, is one of my most important works and is, so to speak, the mother of all other works. Inside, it is covered with over 160 faces, including my very first pieces. Over the years, I have condensed the felt more and more, stabilising it, and refining the facial features, but they are still more sketchy than the individual heads and busts that were created afterwards.

The human face and head remain one of my

central themes, as the human essence and the expression of the spirit and soul can be found there. The shapes and outgrowths that are attached to the heads refer to mental movements and spiritual connection with the inexpressible. Often the gaze is directed inwards, timeless and knowing, as if they were looking at what was behind the external things as eternal truths, and as if this knowledge gave them their calm and noble demeanour. This is particularly noticeable with the three large *Big Heads*; like gods, they rest, their gaze directed skyward, into the infinite.

Some works, such as *Protector*, show a human-animal symbiosis. However, this is not meant as a chimera, but is to be understood as an energetic, part-spiritual

and part-physical connection with specific animal traits and intuitive powers.

In *Turn* and *Sudden Turning*, the phases of a rapid turn of the head are present simultaneously. In addition to the sculptural aspect, the 'painting' or 'drawing' treatment of the surface is essential in these works: it is also needle-felted, thread-like or in fine layers with different coloured but undyed wool. For example, an impression from a dream flashes across the *Dreamer's* dark face as a fine, bright drawing. The wool is a wonderful carrier of these lively, subtly moving internal aspects, as the sculptures, despite their great density, retain an open, breathing surface and an almost vital, warm aura. A visitor to my last exhibition said that these heads, if they were carved from stone, would be like the image of

a being; since they are made of wool, they are themselves.

I love the powerful and yet meditative nature of needle felting: wide spaces of thought open up and, in addition to the craftmaking, there is always the sensitive process of feeling what comes out of the piece. There is still a lot to discover, and it's exciting every time I go into the studio; what will reveal itself next?

**Stefanie Ehrenfried**  
**w: stefanie-ehrenfried.de**  
**e: se@stefanie-ehrenfried.de**  
**i: stefanieehrenfried**

**All photographs by Stefanie Ehrenfried unless otherwise stated.**