

RESOBX World AMIGURUMI Exhibition

Interview by: Dennis Crosby



**RESO
BOX**
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In the middle of Queens, one of the most diverse places in the world with 150 spoken languages lies a little gem called Resobox. Resobox is a Japanese art gallery and cultural center where people who are conversant with, dedicated to, and influenced by Japanese arts can gather, create, and innovate arts through the collaborative process and disseminate them to the world. I had the pleasure of being invited by the owner, Takashi Ikezawa. He randomly sent me an email about an Amigurumi exhibit he put together that I just “had to see”. I was a little skeptical going in.

Thanks to my time with Happily Hooked, I’ve grown a new appreciation for the art of crochet, but not yet to the point where art exhibits excite me. But being the only person from our team in New York, I decided to do it, and it was the best decision I could have made! Takashi’s email didn’t do his exhibit justice. It was amazing. There are over 4000 pieces of Amigurumi from 140 designers in 32 countries around the world. Those numbers may not sound like a big deal, but when you see it for yourself, you’ll see a different picture.



Just to give you an idea, it took Takashi and his helpers over 80 hours to hang them all up! It was overwhelming to step into this cozy little café and see every inch of it (including the ceilings) covered by crocheted toys. The only thing as unique as this exhibit is Takashi himself. In another life, he was a banker. While getting his MBA, he decided that he wanted to open up a Japanese cultural center. Since then he has been on a mission to expose and educate the residents of Queens on Japanese culture.

I had the pleasure of sitting down with Takashi for a brief chat.

Why Amigurumi?

Amigurumi is stuff that originated in Japan, but now crocheters who are making it are from around the world, which is the most interesting aspect that inspires me. As a Japanese cultural center, our goal is to disseminate Japanese culture to the world. But, I always feel that Japanese culture should be created by not only Japanese people but also by non-Japanese people who are influenced by the culture through collaboration.

Thanks to the technological development, people's distances are much closer compared with decades ago. Culture (any culture) is made by people, so once people's distances got closer, and more and more people mingle at a much faster pace, cultures also mix and spread more and more at a faster pace. The Japanese culture as we currently know it is different from the one decades ago, and it will be different from the one in decades later. The future Japanese culture might be a mix of Greek culture, or influenced by some culture from Africa and become a totally different shape. Nobody knows. But I'd like to know it. And also I would like to be involved with the flow creating the future Japanese culture.

When we look at Amigurumi, even though the culture started in Japan decades ago, (which is very recent) there are already over a few thousands crocheters putting their Amigurumi on Etsy or other craft sites. Before the Internet, it wasn't like this. So I thought that I would organize an Amigurumi event for many artists around the world as a platform to let them collaborate for the future as a hub. They can share their designs and ideas with other artists and encourage each other to create new stuffed animals using local yarns and new color to see how artists in each country perceive and develop it.

I also thought that there is a huge potential in Amigurumi when I found that when I joined Vogue Knitting Live as a guest artist this year, there are many garments (hats, gloves, etc.) but there are quite few stuffed animals displayed. So many people visited our booth saying, "I would like to know how to make that!".

What gave you the idea?

Our Japanese classical dance instructor at RESOBOX, Ms. Helen E. Moss is a crochet instructor as well, and teaches at some places in Manhattan. So I have known Amigurumi since 2011, but I had been thinking about how it should be displayed to the public—selecting the best 30 pieces? Or featuring only one artist who creates fantastic ones? But, I noticed that Amigurumi is a very new culture and not so many people know about it. So I wanted to focus on "introducing the name" this time and decided to fill the gallery with pieces from ceiling to all walls.

Japanese Anime, Manga culture, and some Kawaii (cute) culture is very popular in NY. But animism, the philosophy that Japanese people have in their minds in general, is not known outside Japan yet. In Japan, there are so many gods and each of them belongs to everything—water, stones, food and even money.

We respect all of them as co-existing partners by giving them imaginary lives and humanly features like eyes, legs, etc. I don't like to push out our culture and force people who are not interested in it to understand it, but this philosophy might be applied for everybody in the world. I thought that besides Anime and Manga, Amigurumi could also be another way of spreading out the philosophy.

How has the exhibit been received?

To ordinary people, I thought that the cute Japanese culture is only admired by younger ages like teenager or below (in Japan everybody likes these stuff), but once I started the exhibition, so many adults came in to the gallery and bought pieces for themselves, and I am still surprised with the potential of Japanese Anime culture. From crocheters, I got lots of great feedback! They are always looking for the opportunity to see others' works, especially the ones from other countries. And in this exhibition, I didn't make sections by countries even though they are from 32 different countries (which is one of the most unique points in the exhibition). They are all mixed up so that works created by a US artist are next to the ones by an Armenian artist and so on; it is truly a "World" exhibition. I have received many requests from Amigurumi artists since the exhibition opened that they want to participate next year.





I will select Amigurumi next year so that we will have a good mix of pieces from many countries from all over the world.

What was it like connecting with 144 different crocheters from around the world?

Some artists don't speak English and their families or friends help them translate and communicate with me. I started to contact each one of them around September, just two

and half months before the opening of the exhibition, so I had a tough time talking to every one of them. However, it was very fun to me to do that because all artists who are communicating with me over emails and phones were very excited with my plan, and they were all very nice and polite to me and punctual. Also, on a closed Facebook group that I made for the participants, they are introducing each other and interacting with their own works and having fun.

So now I feel glad that I made this exhibition.

One of the great things about Amigurumi is people can connect with each other through patterns. It is a language for anyone who loves knitting and crocheting.

I believe that I can find more and more people who are doing Amigurumi in the world in the future.

You seem very passionate about spreading Japanese culture. Why is that?

As I mentioned, my goal is to not just introduce the Japanese culture but also create with people around the world, because any culture is not for the people from the country that is originated, but for everybody who loves it. Japanese food like Sushi has been popular for a long time in the world, and when mixed with other food cultures we see many types of “Japanese fusion” in the world.

When it comes to other stuff, such as dance, music and art, not so many collaborations are seen yet. One of the reasons is that people in the world don’t know how diverse the Japanese culture is, so it is natural that collaborations in those areas don’t happen much yet.

I would like people in the world to learn more about Japan and visit the country, and would also like Japanese people to go abroad more and interact with people outside the country. It would be fantastic if I could have the World Amigurumi Exhibition in many cities on all continents in the world and have fun together with people all over the world.

The World Amigurumi Exhibition runs until February 28th.

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For more information about RESOBOX, please visit their website.



Meet Dennis
Crosby

Dennis is new to the crochet world, and still can’t tell a hank from a skein, but he’s working on it. He’s been in the marketing world for 8 years, and works hard behind the scenes to help get the Happily Hooked name out there. He is very serious about making sure our readers have the best experience possible. When you reach out for help, you will probably cross paths with him.