ARTS & CULTURE

TEXTILES ARTS

Teen's secret unravels: he's hooked on crochet

MICHAEL GURNEY
Arts & Culture Writer



MICHAEL GURNEY PHOTO

Teenage artist and entrepreneur Matias Gannon also enjoys hand knitting and building with Lego.

A 15-year-old fixture of Sunshine Coast artisan fairs — including last weekend's 60-vendor marketplace in Sechelt — only this summer admitted to peers that he has maintained a vigorous crocheting practice for more than a half a decade.

"I wasn't really open about my business until a couple months ago," said Matias Gannon. Gannon was a 10-year-old living in Yellowknife when the COVID-19 lockdown shuttered schools and workplaces. The day before in-person commerce ground to a halt, his mother drove him to a nearby Wal-Mart where he purchased a yarn hook and his first skein.

"I've always been artsy, so I learned to crochet during the quarantine," he explained. "There's not a crazy story with a grandma involved, but that's my origin story, and since then I've been just constantly at it, crocheting every day." He studied YouTube videos to refine his skills. During trips to Turkey to visit extended family, he stocked up on high-quality yarn from Istanbul. (Gannon's mother and father are Turkish and Chilean respectively; he is fluent in Turkish and also speaks Spanish and French.)

When his family relocated to the Sunshine Coast in 2023, Gannon started hawking his winsome plushie creatures — long-legged frogs, buxom pigs, diminutive ducklings — at craft fairs. Even though he was expanding his brand by starting an Instagram account and Etsy store, he remained closemouthed around his friends. During middle school in Yellowknife, he had been bullied for his unconventional pastime. "So I was more on the down low," he recalled. "I used to not have people over in my room because I didn't want them seeing my crochet."

Now preparing to start Grade 11 at Elphinstone Secondary School, Gannon sensed the time was right to go public about Matias Crochet Creations. "Now kids understand, and I'm just more open about it," he said. "I've unblocked everybody, and they think it's cool, so it's not like I don't have to hide it anymore."

Gannon refers to himself as a full-time crochet artist: he is a regular exhibitor at Saturday markets run by the Gibsons Public Market, and has also expanded his reach to shows across the Lower Mainland. He uses patterns for many of his plushies, but has also learned to freehand his own designs. He supplements the barnyard menagerie with bandanas and toques. The headgear is double-layered, ready to withstand the temperatures of 40 below zero that Gannon experienced when walking to school in Yellowknife. He designed a beanie thin enough to be worn under a ski helmet. "It looked steezy, so I made it," he said. He purchased a hand loom and uses it for some products, but invariably returns to his crochet hook and extensive supply of Turkish yarns.

While waiting for customers or en route to the ski hill, Gannon patiently works strands of yarn into miniature playthings with anthropomorphic appeal. Entrepreneurism comes with its own rigours: preparing for the Hackett Park artisan fair, he stayed awake until 2 o'clock in the morning to ready his wares. He hopes to launch a website this fall (with help from his twin brother) and plans to offer classes to other budding textile artists.

After graduation, he has his sights set on the engineering faculty at the University of BC — not least because of the campus's proximity to local ski hills.

With his secret identity finally a matter of public record, Gannon downplays comparisons to intrepid crusaders. "I think crocheting frogs is a lot less daunting than stopping a meteorite from crashing into New York City," he shrugged. For him, creativity surmounts gender- and age-related stereotypes. "It's versatile because literally anything you can imagine, you can make with crochet," he added, "and it's a great way to express yourself."

Gannon's actively-maintained Instagram channel can be found at @matias_crochet_creations.

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Friedman is one of the most spellbinding and unique performers to emerge from Canada's West Coast music scene. Fusing a distinctive blend of stirring vocals and instrumental virtuosity he has been stoking and delighting audiences around the world with his exquisite song artistry for many years.

In Roberts Creek on Sunday, the Slow Sundays in the Creek concert series continues in the amphitheatre behind the community library. Performers will include the irrepressible Beachcombers Ukulele Group Singers, Michael Lacoste (founder of the Inner Ears Studios), and the Holly Hawkes (featuring Megan Mansbridge and Joel Fafard with guest musician Kaia Nielsen joining them on standup bass and harmonies). Additional performers will be announced by coordinator Mark Trevis, who maintains the frequently updated Facebook group called Slow Sundays in the Creek.



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Local authors Ruth Rodgers, Jan DeGrass, Mike Starr, Elizabeth Elwood, Cindy Labonte-Smith, Leslie Macfarlane and Sheila Weaver (joined by Bryan Mortensen of the BC Federation of Writers) exhibited at St. Hilda's in Sechelt last weekend and will be among the scores of writers and artists featured at the upcoming Art & Words Festival in Gibsons.

Weekend of words

"Every weekend in August, there's so much happening on the Coast," opined Coast Cultural Alliance executive director Linda Williams during a visit to the book fair at St. Hilda's Anglican Church last weekend.

The authors who exhibited there are among the writers who will be featured at the Art & Words Festival this weekend at the Gibsons Public Market (Aug. 22 to 24). The weekend festival features workshops, readings, and a screening of the film *Body of Light* by the late Gordon Halloran (4:15 p.m. on Sunday).

The Sunshine Coast Book Awards for BC Authors will also be announced during a ceremony on Saturday evening (starting at 6:15 p.m.).

Registration and a full schedule of events is available by browsing to scwes.ca.

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