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(54) **PLUSH TOY**

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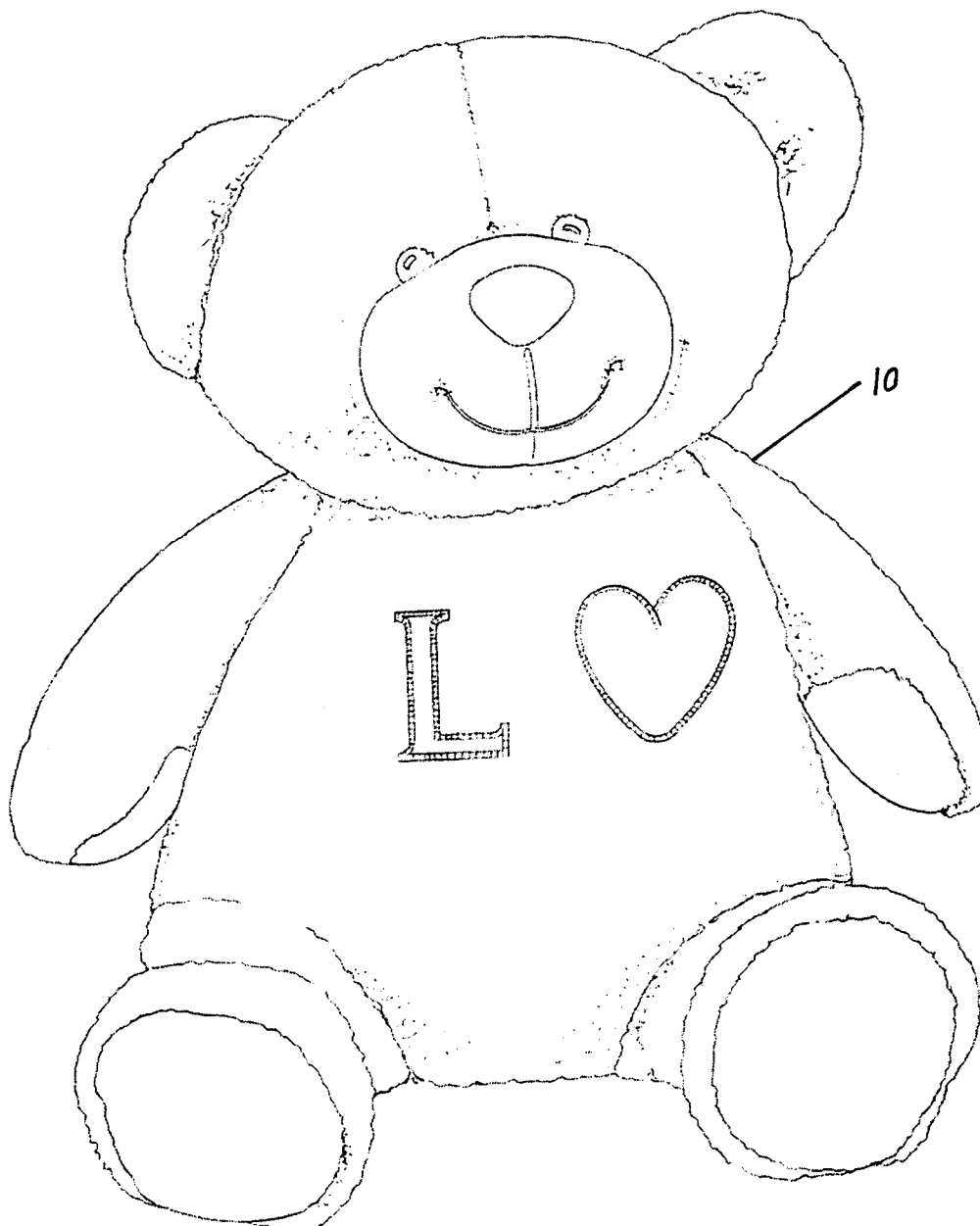
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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A plush toy has a stuffed fabric shell having at least one shell piece with an orifice closed by a releasable fastener. A stuffing pouch stuffed with filling and having a shape generally corresponding the shell piece can be removed from and replaced in the shell to allow the shell piece to be embroidered.



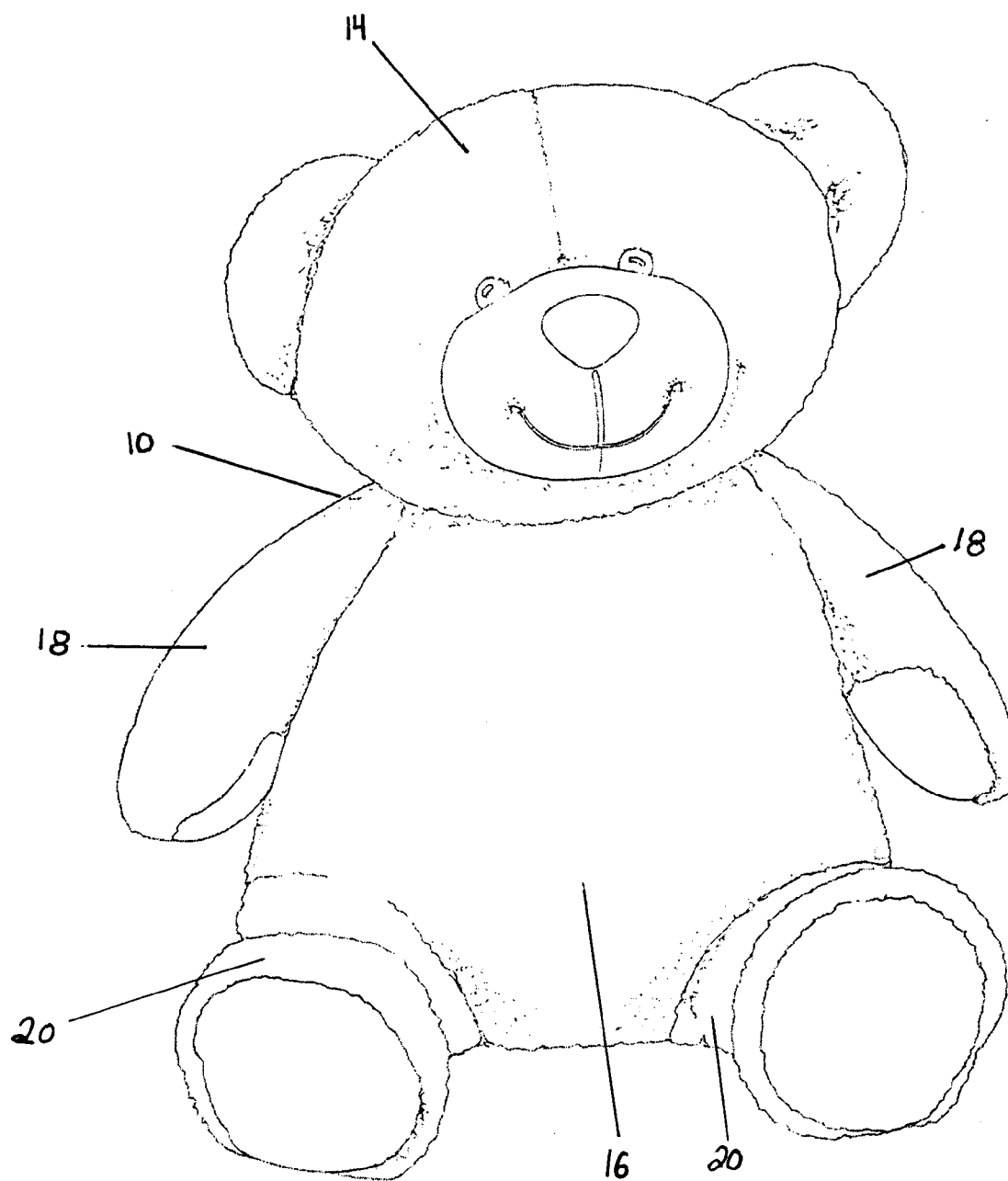


Figure 1

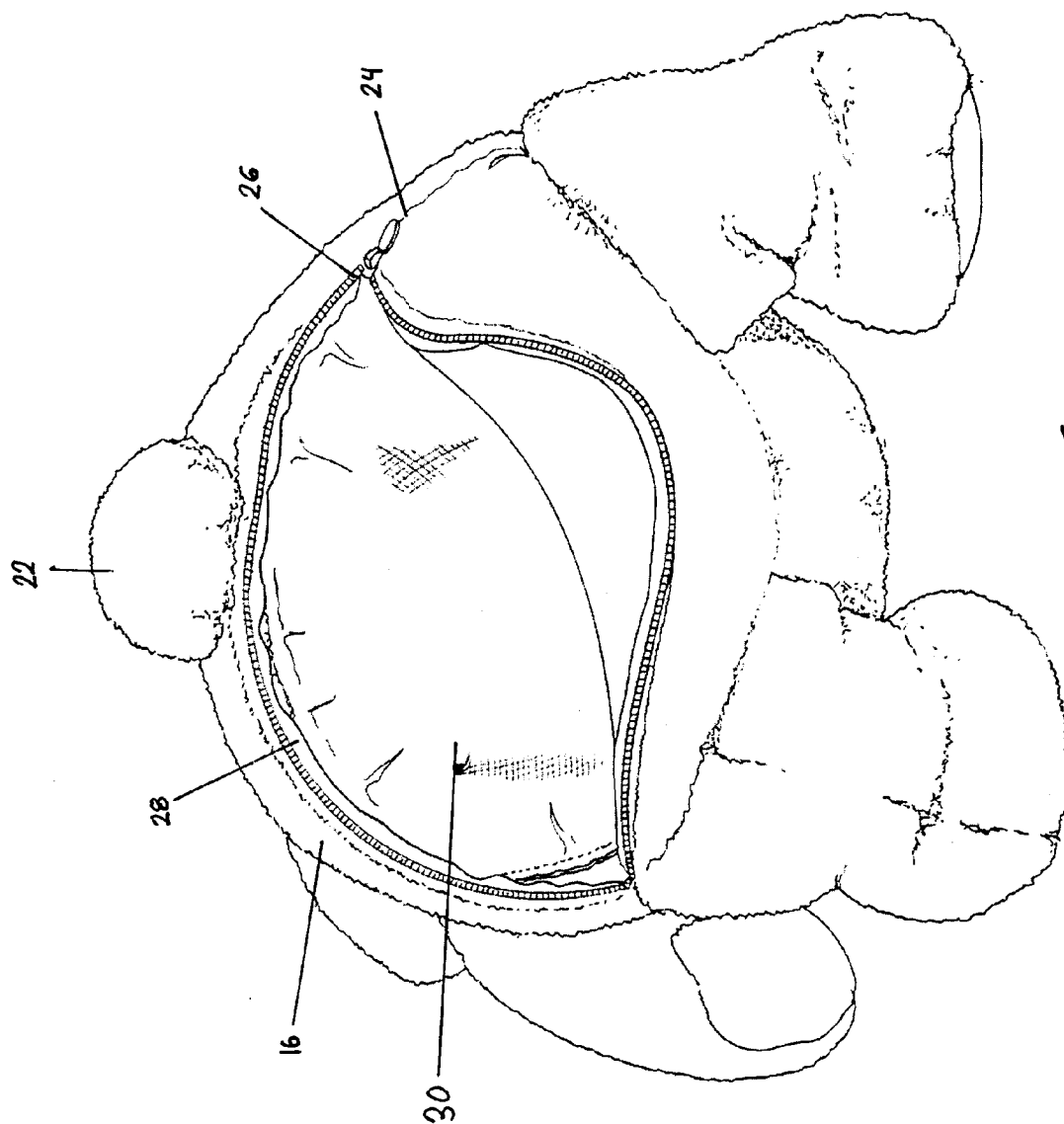


Figure 2

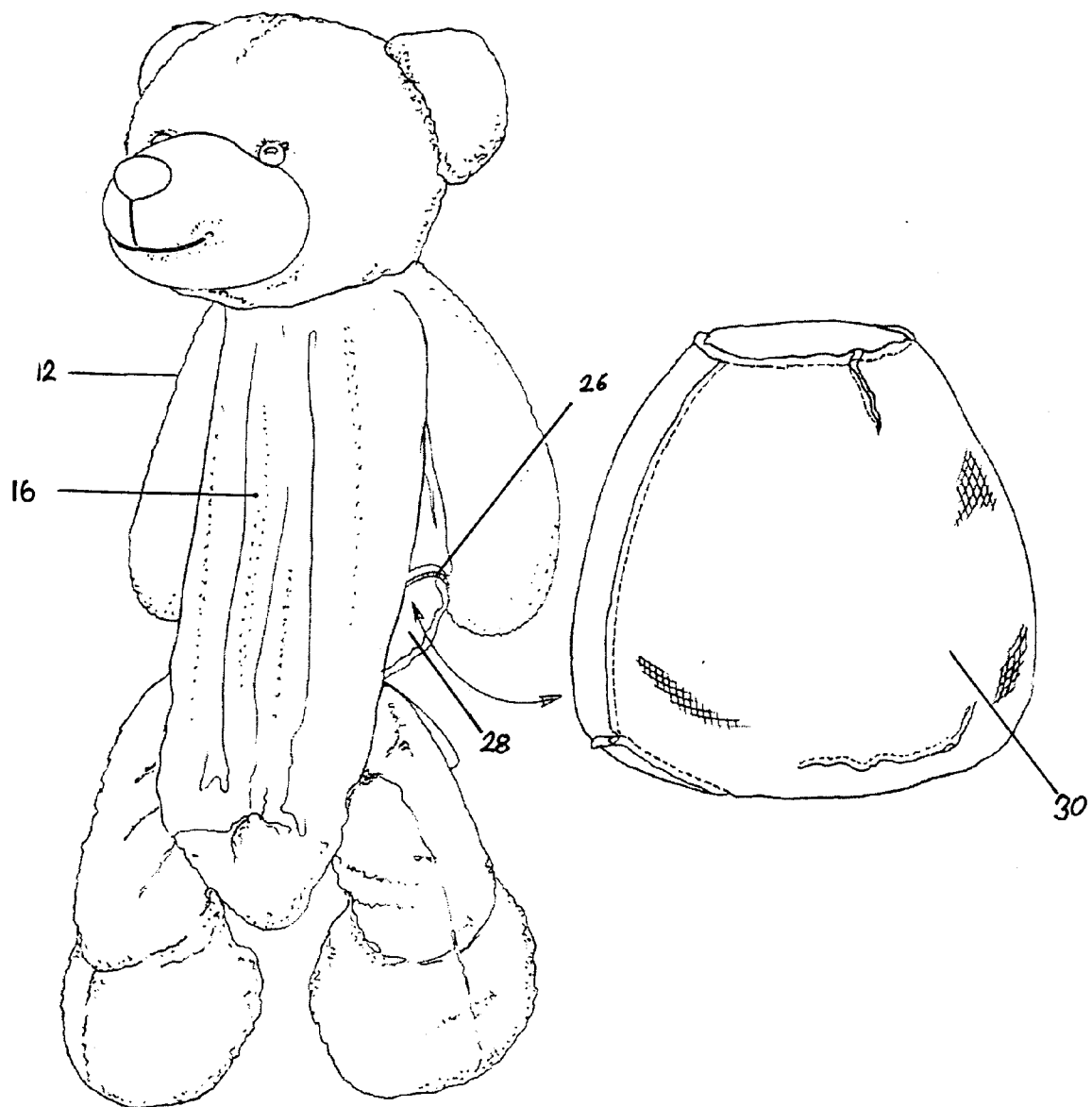


Figure 3

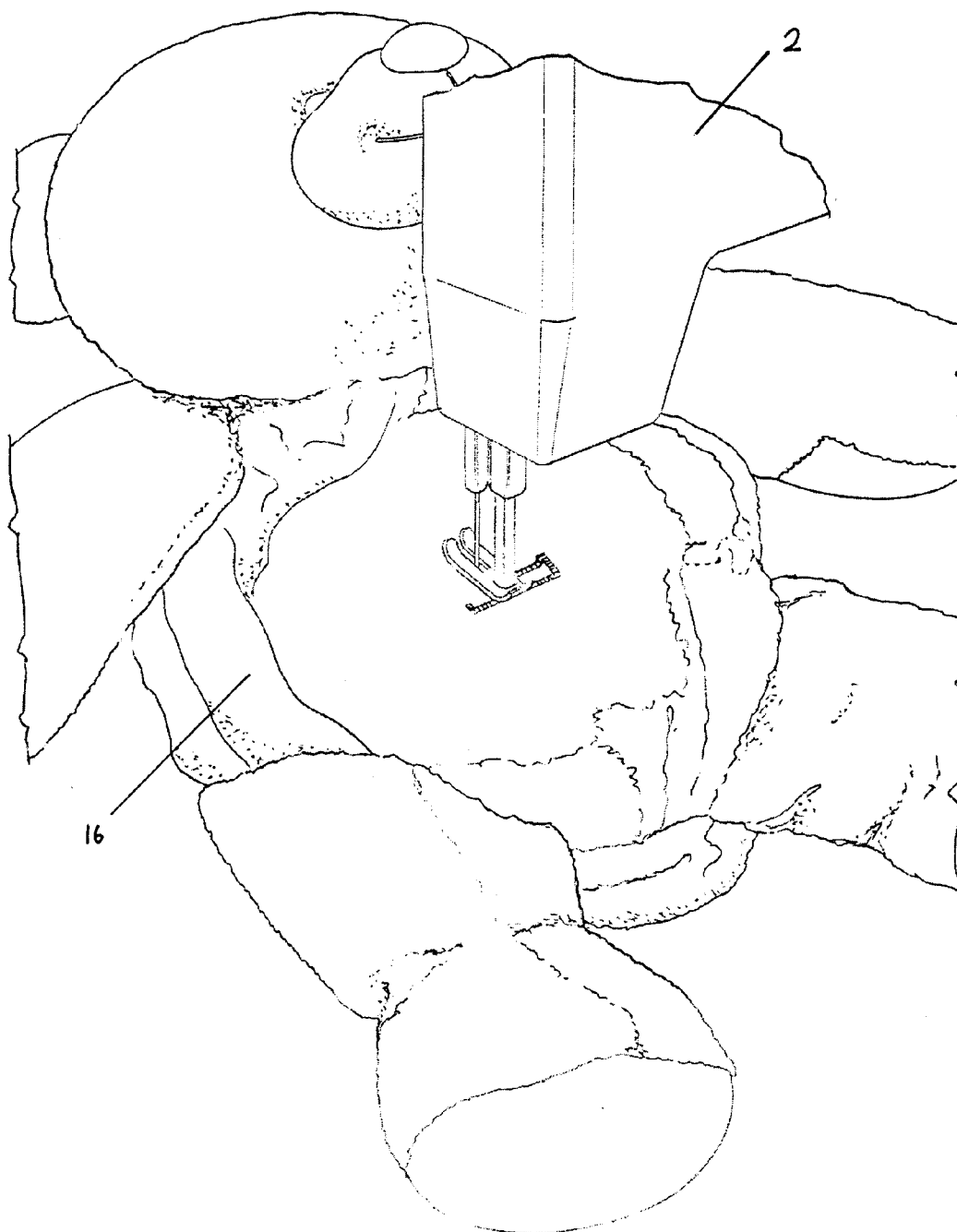


Figure 4

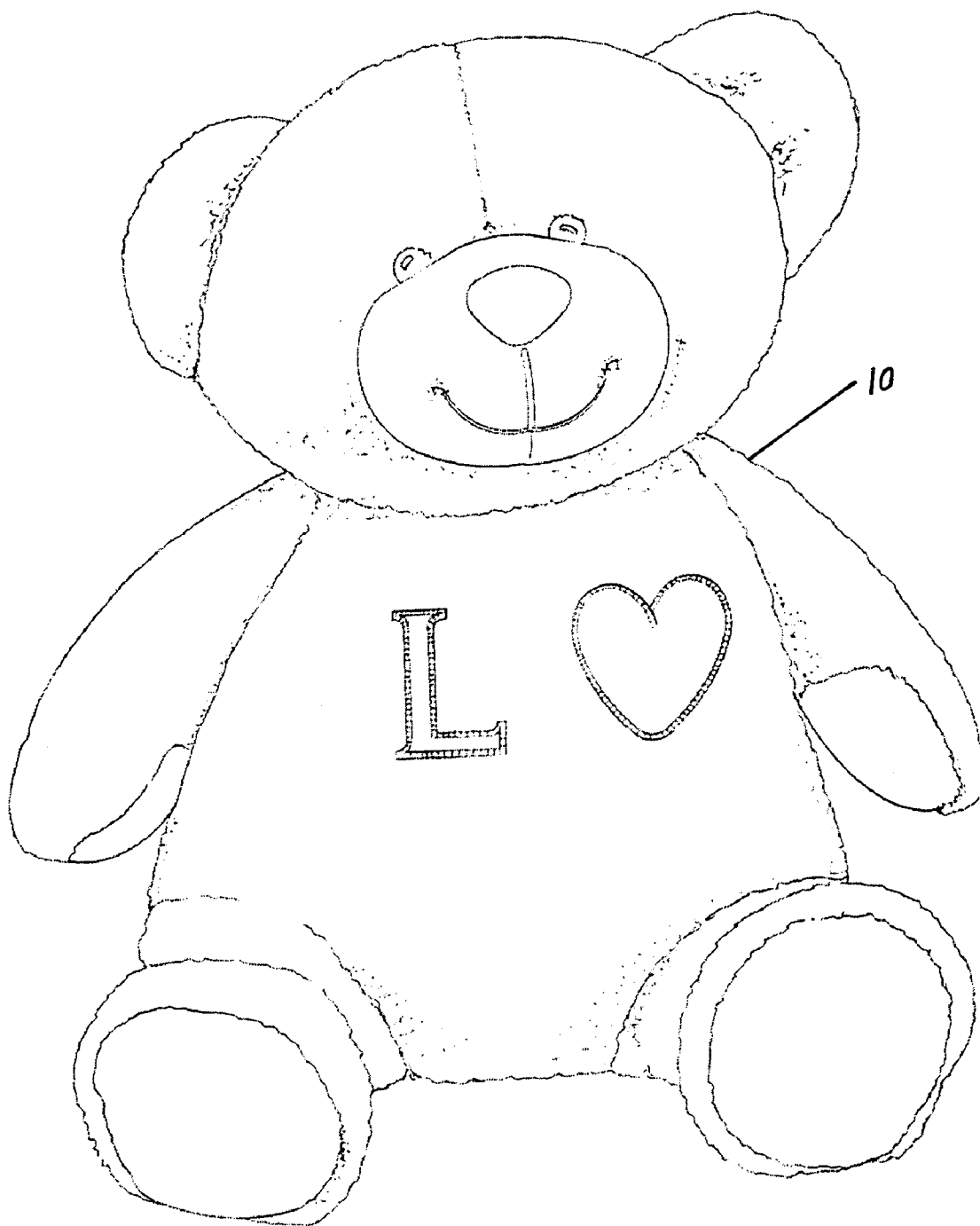


Figure 5

PLUSH TOY

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to the field of plush toys and figures.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Plush toys and figures, often in the form of stuffed animals such as so-called “teddy bears,” are familiar gifts, objects of affection, collector items, and companions of children. The significance of such toys is often the sentiment associated with them. Therefore, custom alteration of plush toys is encouraged so as to increase the emotive nature of the toys. Also, the custom alteration of a plush toy can add to the enjoyment of the toy by providing an enjoyable leisure activity which is both productive and personal to the toy’s owner.

[0003] Plush toys are commonly personalized by dressing the figures in meaningful clothes. Some retailers offer stuffed animals pre-dressed according to a theme, while others allow the purchaser to select among a variety of styles and colours of clothing. Alternatively, a plush toy and the clothing may be purchased separately. Such clothing is often marketed as being “embroidery friendly”. Embroidery is a popular art used to personalize plush toys, among other things, by stitching names, initials, custom designs or other indicia onto the toys’ clothing.

[0004] The ability to embroider designs or other indicia onto a plush toy, as opposed to articles of clothing which might accompany the toy, is limited. Machine embroidery, and the use of an embroidery hoop cannot be used on plush toys since only one side of the outer shell or skin of the figure is exposed. Not only does this increase the difficulty in embroidering a design, it creates the risk of stitching some of the filling to the internal side of the outer shell, causing lumps. In addition, any simple design that may be hand embroidered onto the outer shell of the figure will sink into the plush fur of the figure and potentially adversely affect the aesthetic appearance of the toy.

[0005] A manufacturer may overcome the difficulties of embroidering directly onto a plush toy by performing the embroidery before the toy has been stuffed and closed. For obvious commercial reasons, custom embroidery employing such a method by the manufacturer is only feasible for voluminous commercial orders, and not on an individual basis to the general public. Once assembled, further embroidery of the toy by the purchaser is restricted by the limitations as described above.

[0006] An owner of a plush toy may avoid the complications of embroidering a completed plush toy by cutting open the toy and removing the stuffing from inside the figure; however, this method has its own shortcomings. Difficulties associated with handling the filling, re-stuffing the toy, and closing the shell of the toy can result in a decline in aesthetics, durability, and overall quality of the plush toy. It is accordingly difficult for the owner of a plush toy to perform custom embroidery in a manner that retains the original ‘look’ of the toy.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] In drawings which illustrate by way of example only a preferred embodiment of the invention,

[0008] FIG. 1 is a front view of a plush toy embodying the invention.

[0009] FIG. 2 is a bottom view of the plush toy of FIG. 1 showing an access for removal and replacement of a stuffing pouch.

[0010] FIG. 3 is a front view of the plush toy of FIG. 1 with the stuffing pouch removed.

[0011] FIG. 4 is a front view of the plush toy of FIG. 1 being embroidered.

[0012] FIG. 5 is a front view of the plush toy of FIG. 1 following embroidery.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0013] The present invention provides a plush toy in which the outer shell of the toy can be opened, and an inner stuffing pouch containing the filling can be removed from the shell without changing the shape of the stuffing. In this way, an individual is able to easily remove or replace the stuffing pouch and retain the original ‘look’ of the plush toy. With the stuffing pouch removed, the plush toy is capable of being embroidered by the owner, using conventional techniques. Since in this condition the inner and outer faces of the fabric of the toy’s shell are exposed, the use of stabilizers, hoops, and/or embroidery machines is possible. As a result, an individual can embroider personal, high quality designs or other indicia directly onto virtually any part of a plush toy, at any time. In addition, the self-contained stuffing pouch protects the filling from degradation and improper or awkward looking distribution caused by repacking after removal.

[0014] The depicted embodiment of the invention is comprised of a plurality of shell pieces 14 fastened together to form the shape of the plush toy 10, in the embodiment shown a “teddy bear” solely by way of example, however the toy can be in any shape or form, including real and fictitious characters and other objects.

[0015] Each shell piece is comprised of one or more pieces of fabric, for example a plush fabric, fastened (typically sewn) together so as to form the shape of a particular body part of the plush toy. The fabric shell 12 of the illustrated embodiment comprises a plurality of shell pieces including a head shell 14, body shell 16, arm shells 18, leg shells 20, and tail shell 22. In alternative embodiments, one or more shell pieces may be used to form the shape of any real or fanciful creature or other object.

[0016] In the embodiment shown, the pieces of fabric forming the body shell 16 are permanently fastened together (for example by sewing) except along at least one seam 24, where the fabric is detachably fastened together by a releasable element 26 such as a zipper as shown, forming an orifice 28. The releasable fastener 26 may alternatively comprise one or more buttons, grommets, laces, snaps or other fasteners including hook-and-loop fasteners such as Velcro (trade-mark).

[0017] The orifice 28 is large enough to allow the insertion of a stuffing pouch 30 into and removal of the stuffing pouch 30 out of the body shell 16. Although the orifice 26 is preferably formed along an inconspicuous seam of the shell 12, the orifice 28 may be provided anywhere on the shell 12 which allows for insertion and removal of the stuffing pouch 30.

[0018] The head shell 14, arm shells 18, leg shells 20, and tail shell 22 of the illustrated embodiment are stuffed with suitable filling such as polyester, and in the illustrated embodiment are permanently closed using any suitable method such as sewing. One skilled in the art would appreciate that any filling material, or combination of filling materials, could be used to stuff the shells, including but not

limited to cotton, plastic, glass, beans, oats, or otherwise. Likewise, one skilled in the art would appreciate that any form of fill could be used in the invention, including but not limited to pellets, beads, balls, fibres etc.

[0019] The stuffing pouch **30** may also be stuffed with any suitable filling, typically the same filling used for the other parts of the plush toy **10**. The body shell **16** is stuffed with the filling pouch **30**, which is a self-contained and preferably permanently sealed container of preferably a flexible fabric, such as cotton or any other suitable fabric (which can be a less expensive fabric than the shell **12** because the stuffing pouch **30** is concealed when the toy is in use). The shape and size of stuffing pouch **30** corresponds roughly to the shape and size of the body shell **16**, such that when the stuffing pouch **30** is inserted into the body shell **16** it tensions the shell **16** to provide the desired "look." One skilled in the art will appreciate that the stuffing pouch **30** could alternatively be formed from a solid moulded compressible material, such as a shaped foam block (not shown) which provides the desired shape to the plush toy **10**.

[0020] The stuffing pouch **30** may be inserted into the body shell **16** by the manufacturer, and the orifice **28** closed by the releasable fastener **26**. Following purchase, the user may open the orifice **28** by releasing the releasable fastener **26**, as shown in FIG. 2, and remove the stuffing pouch **30** as shown in FIG. 3. The user, now having access to both faces of the body shell **16**, may then embroider the body shell **16** to apply any desired pattern, text, design or other indicia, using an embroidery hoop with or without stabilizers, or an embroidery machine as shown.

[0021] In the illustrated manner of embroidering the plush toy **10**, an adhesive stabilizer (not shown) may be mounted in a hoop (not shown), and the inside of the body shell **16** may be applied to the adhesive stabilizer, corresponding to the positioning marks of the intended design. The plush toy **10** and hoop are then loaded onto an embroidery machine **2**. A water soluble stabilizer may be placed on the outside of the body shell **16**, to prevent the stitching from sinking into the plush fabric. The desired design is then stitched into the body shell **16**. Once the design is finished, the toy **10** is dismounted from the machine and the excess stabilizer is removed.

[0022] When embroidery is complete, the user inserts the stuffing pouch **30** into the body shell **16** and closes the releasable fastener **26** to retain the stuffing pouch **30** in position, producing a custom-embroidered plush toy **10** as shown in FIG. 5. This process can be repeated at any time that an individual would like to embroider a design on the toy.

[0023] It will be appreciated that since the body shell's filling is entirely contained within the stuffing pouch **30**, it is not necessary for the releasable fastener to completely close the body shell **16**. Thus, releasable fastener **26** may include (but is not limited to) any type of fastener including buttons, laces and snaps, or any combination of releasable fastening means, without any loss of filler.

[0024] One skilled in the art will appreciate that the method of the invention can be applied to any of the shell pieces **14**, **16**, **18**, **20**, **22** forming parts of the plush toy **10**, or any combination of these shell pieces **14**, **16**, **18**, **20**, **22**.

[0025] Various embodiments of the present invention having been thus described in detail by way of example, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that variations and modifications may be made without departing from the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A plush toy having a stuffed shell, comprising:

at least one piece of fabric fastened together to form a fabric shell, the shell comprising at least one shell piece comprising an orifice,

a releasable fastener for detachably fastening the orifice; and,

a stuffing pouch stuffed with filling and having a shape generally corresponding the shell piece;

wherein the stuffing pouch can be removed from and replaced in the shell to allow the shell piece to be embroidered.

2. A method of embroidering a plush toy comprising a fabric shell, the shell comprising at least one shell piece having an orifice, comprising the steps of:

a. opening a releasable fastener to expose the orifice,

b. removing a stuffing pouch through the orifice,

c. embroidering indicia on the fabric shell,

d. replacing the stuffing pouch through the orifice, and

e. closing the releasable fastener.

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