

The Doll's House Museum Basel presents:

“Animals in Motion”

A special exhibition of mechanical Steiff showpieces

The Doll's House Museum will be presenting from the 8th May until the 9th October 2005 eight original Steiff showpieces manufactured during the 1950s up to the present day.

Showpieces with moving, mechanical animals have been popular since the 17th century. The renowned firm of Margaret Steiff GmbH, located in Giengen an der Brenz in Wurttemberg, has often made use of such mechanical, animated scenes to effectively promote their products.

From 1910 onwards, Steiff entrusted the artistic design of their products to their inhouse designer Albert Schlopsnies. He was also responsible for their showpieces. In 1910, the Berlin department store Wertheim put the showpiece entitled “The Circus” on display. It consisted of three circus arenas comprising a colourful group of artists, clowns and animals and was a huge success. Further large showpieces followed, such as “The Great Fire in Dingharting” in 1912 and “Noah's Ark” at the Bavarian Trade Exhibition in Munich in 1913/14. The displayed dolls measured 43 cm. to 50 cm. in height. They were all attired in very imaginative clothing and decorated with a large variety of accessories, including in some cases, brass helmets.

The showpieces show everyday events in an original scenario, in which various Steiff dolls and cuddly animals play important roles. These showpieces were milestones in the history of the success of the house of Steiff. Important department stores showed them off as shop window attractions, which fascinated large audiences. They were always a great attraction at trade fairs as well as at world exhibitions.

Craftsmen at Steiff in Giengen still handcraft numerous showpieces in the traditional style. Even today, they fascinate both the old and the young wherever they are on display.

How a showpiece is produced

First, the theme is selected. It is then the design department's job to create the motif and decide on the size as well as suitable variations. The model carpenters create a sample model and the mechanics decide how to animate the model to obtain the desired effects. It is only at this point that the form of the animals and dolls are chosen. The carpenters construct all additions such as houses, fountains and bridges. In order to manufacture the small and more delicate decorative pieces, plaster forms are filled with latex, which is a more stable material than styrofoam. Every piece is painted individually. The mechanical elements, which are made of metal, are fitted into the animals. Basically, there are two types of movements that the animals perform: they move up and down, or sideways. The motors, located beneath the base plate on which the animals are mounted, control the movement by means of a complex arrangement of rods, gears and levers.

It takes five specialised craftsmen several weeks to create such a showpiece.

Press information and pictures are available, also online at:
www.puppenhausmuseum.ch/schaustuecke

Opening Hours

Museum/Shop: Daily from 11 am. to 5 pm., Thursdays until 8 pm.
Café: Daily from 10 am. to 6 pm., Thursdays until 9 pm.

Entrance

CHF 7.–/CHF 5.–

Children up to 16 years are admitted free of charge, and only if accompanied by an adult.

There is no additional entrance fee for this special exhibition.

The whole building is accessible to wheelchairs.

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Showpieces on display

The following eight showpieces can be seen in this special exhibition at the Doll's House Museum in Basel:

Villa Flora	The Villa Flora is brought to life by Meckis (hedgehogs), monkeys and hares. Sunflowers and a scarecrow add to the atmosphere.
Smithy	Monkeys and Meckis are hard at work. A large water-wheel provides the energy for the smithy to work.
Poster Artists	Petz (bear) and Mister Lampe (hare) are painting posters.
Hobby Film Producers	The team of monkeys is out filming in the wilderness.
Scissor Grinder	Mister Lampe (hare) is busy working at the grinding stone, whilst Mrs. Petz (she-bear) is upstairs shaking out the laundry.
Caravan	Happy daily life of the animals in and around the caravan.
Guesthouse "Hollow Tree"	The cook is already preparing the chicken on the grill. Upstairs the laundry is being shaken out.
Test Laboratory	Professor Monkey is studying his test tubes, whilst little pig is undergoing a water test.