

The Doll's House Museum in Basel will be presenting:

Felt used in doll-making

A special exhibition about Steiff felt dolls

The Doll's House Museum in Basel will be presenting over 70 original old Steiff felt dolls from 16th May until 10th October 2004. The exhibition, which covers 15 m², gives a unique and authentic view of the art of doll-making in the 1920s, as well as of the cooperation between the family firm of Margarete Steiff GmbH and the doll designer, Albert Schlopsnies.

The beginning of Steiff's doll production

Under the leadership of Margarete Steiff (1847–1909) the young Steiff family firm in Giengen an der Brenz developed the first dolls around 1890. A few years later, in about 1894, a comprehensive range of 17 types of dolls came onto the market. According to the firm's own description, the dolls had „felt bodies and clothing and their heads were indestructible and washable “.

Dolls with character

In about 1903 Richard Steiff developed the first dolls made out of felt and velvet. The crudely formed flesh-coloured faces were made from velvet with a vertical seam running down the centre of the face. They had round black shoe-button eyes, painted facial expressions and painted hair, which was later replaced by long-haired plush wigs. Instead of the usually uniform faces of porcelain dolls, these creations had real human faces with individual characteristic expressions, and therefore the name given to them was „character dolls“.

This new doll was marketed as indestructible and hard-wearing and would withstand any amount of child's play. Clothes and underwear could be removed. The lifelike and delightful manner of this innovative creation spread fear throughout the traditional doll industry. It can be assumed, that Steiff was the first firm to produce soft, stuffed character dolls.

Caricatural dolls

In 1910 Steiff decided to imitate the humorous figures around him in a caricatural way in his dolls. Thus dolls developed which brought joy and fun into the children's playrooms; e.g. the village musicians and the schoolmaster with his boys (to be seen in the exhibition) and many other typical town and country characters. These jolly character dolls were a breath of fresh air to the toy industry and they attracted new buyers and increased the volume of turnover.

The era of Schlopsnies and the first mechanical showpieces

In 1910 the Munich-based doll designer, Albert Schlopsnies, became an adviser to Steiff. Schlopsnies' masterly talent was to be implemented for the development of new dolls. He was to be responsible for the artistic production of showpieces, catalogues, advertising and similar items. Schlopsnies' inventiveness and talent started a new chapter in Steiff's creative production. The selection of character and caricatural dolls increased greatly. The 1910 range included mobile puppet-like pantomime animals on strings as well as immobile groups of dolls for show-windows. These were the forerunners of the famous mechanical showpieces.

Diversity and further development of the character doll

In the 1911/1912 Steiff catalogue 270 types of dolls are listed. In the varied range there are the well-known figures „Struwwelpeter“ and the Steiff soldiers in national and international uniforms (German, Dutch, American, English, French, etc.), footballers, sailors and even Count Zeppelin. Production lasted until the beginning of the 1940s and was then taken up again between the years after the War until 1952.

Steiff felt dolls in the Doll's House Museum in Basel

Although the firm Steiff became world-renowned with the invention of the teddy bear by Richard Steiff in 1902, it can also be counted as one of the best doll producers in the world, due to the variety and artistically very valuable collection of doll creations.

In the Doll's House Museum we are presenting to our visitors a collection of over 70 old Steiff felt dolls which is set in 15 m2 of idyllic country scenery. Most of the exhibited dolls come from the Steiff showpiece entitled „Die Mühle im Grund“ or „The Mill in the Valley“. It was made in 1926 by Albert Schlopsnies. This miniature collection shows humourous characters in a realistic village and farming community. The setting is as follows:

An obstinate donkey is standing on a bridge with his cart and master. At the village fountain there is a group of farmers' wives gossiping together as they wash the clothes. Two men and two women are threshing the corn. A fireman attempts to put out a small fire, whilst a policeman keeps his eye on everything. Nearby at a little river, two fishermen are trying their luck at making a catch and a schoolmaster is giving his class a biology lesson out in the open.

Opening Hours

Museum/Shop:	Daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursdays until 8 p.m.
Café:	Daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursdays until 9 p.m.

Entry

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.

Doll's House Museum Basel
Steinenvorstadt 1
4051 Basel

Phone	+41 (0)61 225 95 95
Fax	+41 (0)61 225 95 96
Internet	www.puppenhausmuseum.ch