

Doll's House Museum – Press Release

From 16 February to 15 September 2002 the Doll's House Museum in Basle will be showing a special exhibition entitled «The cosy world of cuddly toys» in which a large selection of lovable companions will be on display, which have accompanied children through their childhood years.

The origin of cuddly toys

As far back as the frosty Ice Age, children's hearts have been warmed by miniature copies of mammals and toy animals carved from bone. This has been proven by various archeological findings, which date back several hundreds of thousands of years. They show an early love of detail.

Over the centuries toys were made mainly from hard materials like wood, paper, tin, cardboard and papier maché. Sadly they were not made to be cuddled. Then in 1880, Margarethe Steiff introduced onto the market the first felt toy, which was an elephant.

Rapid popularity

The first soft, stuffed toys, which were used as pin cushions, were soon followed by various other animals. As more and more children started to become attached to these little creatures, their production increased in various types and shapes. These soft and cuddly creatures were a huge success in children's playrooms all over the world. In addition to animals from the home, farm and woodlands there were also exotic creatures like camels, okapis, zebras, lions, tigers and crocodiles. One and the same animal would often be produced in different sizes and stances. Later they were joined by mythical creatures and figures from the world of cartoons eg. Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny and Baloo from the Jungle Book.

Fabrics

The fabrics used became more refined over the years. At first, the animals were made from felt, and then a little later from velvet and plush. During the war years paper, unbleached cotton and synthetic rayon „silk“ plush were used. Then in the 1950s dralon plush was introduced. Nowadays, a washable web plush has become fashionable. The noblest animals, however, are still made from mohair, which enhances their charms considerably.

Eyes

Originally black or red pearl eyes, otherwise known as boot button eyes, were used. At the beginning of the 1900s glass eyes were introduced in different colours and with various shapes of pupils, which give the animals a realistic and fascinating expression. With their lovable, warm eyes these cuddly animals can even warm the hearts of adults.

Stuffing and voice boxes

There have also been developments in the materials used for the animals stuffing and voice boxes. The stuffing has developed from wood wool, to sheep's wool, and kapok to synthetic foam rubber. Originally the voice mechanisms were made from leather and a sound was produced by pressing on the torso. Then in 1911 a voice box with miniature bellows was invented and enabled the reproduction of real animal voices. Since the middle of the 1960s synthetic voices are inserted, and sadly the animals all sound alike now.

Markings

The markings were originally painted on by hand, particularly on the old felt and velvet animals. Today they are printed on by machines with non-poisonous and saliva-resistant paint. When necessary small additional markings are added at the end with a spray gun. If the animals are produced in large quantities the markings are woven directly into the plush.

Collectors' delight

Collecting cuddly toys has always been popular. Once attached to a creature we do not give them away easily. One look at those trusting eyes and a gentle stroke over the soft fluffy fur and we are already enraptured. Some animals accompany people through their life right from birth and some stay in the same family for several generations. As the love of these animals grew over the years so did the number of animal manufacturers. In America several toy producers had cuddly toys in their assortment and in England they were fabricated mainly by Merrythought and Farnell. In Germany these animals were produced by Teddy Hermann. Nowadays cuddly toys are desirable collectors' items all over the world. Animals from the internationally-known Steiff production are particularly sought after items. A visit to our special exhibition will convince you of the reasons for their popularity.

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: Fr. 7.-/ Fr.5.-, children up to 16 years free of charge when accompanied by an adult.

No additional charge for the special exhibition.

The Museum is accessible for wheelchairs.

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