

The Doll's House Museum will be presenting:

«Fun in the Animal Kingdom»: a special exhibition showing the moving world of Steiff

The Doll's House Museum in Basle will soon be presenting a real gem to its visitors: a mechanical Steiff showpiece originally produced in 1928 and last displayed in its original form at the 1933 World Fair in Chicago.

The moving world of Steiff

Showpieces, which consisted of theatrical settings populated by moving mechanical figures, have been popular attractions since they were first publicly displayed at the end of the seventeenth century. Several firms, including Steiff, produced such showpieces. Following the death of Margaret Steiff in 1909, the company was taken over by business directors Hugo and Otto Steiff. Due to the prevailing economic crisis, Steiff was compelled to introduce new developments onto the market, in addition to the still successful bears. The original version of the showpiece «Fun in the Animal Kingdom» dates from 1928.

The 1933 World Fair in Chicago

The purpose of the 1933 World Fair in Chicago was to herald in «a century of progress». One of several major themes were the advanced methods developed in the world of children's education. A large children's playground was built, which was called «The Enchanted Island», where the children could play to their hearts' content on roundabouts and miniature trains. They could ride on ponies or admire «Fun in the Animal Kingdom», which was a showpiece of impressive size. It measured 5 meters long, 2 meters high and 2 meters wide. Both adults and children were enchanted by the movements and activities of the mechanized animals. In addition, the children were looked after by trained animators. They were taken to see funny educative plays at the puppet theater. They could also borrow books from a children's library. In this way, the children and all their various amusements became themselves part of the World Fair.

The original showpiece disappeared

It is impossible to find out where the showpiece disappeared to after its last public exhibition at the World Fair in Chicago. Officially it is considered missing since 1933. However, there does remain a photo of the original showpiece which shows it in all its glory. Luckily the photo has been stored in the Steiff archives and is in good condition.

Fun in the animal kingdom

This special exhibition at the Doll's House Museum in Basle has been made possible due to the close collaboration with the Steiff company. The Doll's House Museum commissioned Steiff to build an exact replica of the showpiece, based on original photos from the Steiff archives. The whole mechanism is identical to the original showpiece. The animals are the originals produced in 1928.

Our showpiece features 47 Steiff animals engaged in sporting, musical and other activities. The animals are tumbling around in a building complex, which was built in a modern way for those days and inspired by the «Bauhaus» style. Visitors can come and admire a group of chimpanzees tormenting a group of bears, who are sitting enjoying a cup of coffee. There is a group of rambblers ready to leave. A young lady is playing piano in the Villa Lampe. A young hare is listening to the radio with headphones. A further trio of chimpanzees are playing music and amongst many other figures three elephants are getting into shape in the beauty parlor.

Come and admire the numerous activities of the animals enjoying themselves as if everyday was a holiday.

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.-/ 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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