

Bears from the Basel Museum

*Celebrating 20 years of the world famous
Spielzeug Welten Museum in Basel Switzerland!*

Article by Daniel Agnew

I visited this museum while I was still working for Christie's back in 2001 – it was a wonderful experience, I met Laura the curator for a coffee and then spent many hours wandering around the exhibits.

Back then it was called the Puppenhausmuseum, due to the passion of the director and mastermind of the Steineck Foundation, Gigi Oeri's original love for everything miniature; but now I would say their teddy bear collection is the best in the world and is now its main draw. (perhaps I am biased!)

Set in a beautiful five storey building in the heart of Basel, it has been converted into four exhibition floors. The first thing you really notice are the displays, they are not set out as rows of objects, but themed and displayed with great imagination, perhaps you could



say with the imagination of a child, that sees no bounds! Everything interacting, bears and dolls playing; set around dolls' houses, shops, vehicles and fairground rides.

I would love to tell you about all

their fabulous dolls, dolls' houses, miniature fairgrounds and toys, but this is a teddy bear magazine; so I need to concentrate on these.

It's almost like 'name a rare teddy bear', and they own one, or sometimes lots of them! Perhaps their Steiff collection rivals Steiff's own archive, but probably surpasses it on the teddy bear side. There are familiar faces, black Steiffs galore, including the one I sold back in 2000 as my most expensive bear I have ever sold; the wonderful Gilbert, the finest Dolly Bear out there with a red mohair body dating from 1913; heaps of muzzle bears; heaps of clown bears, heaps of rod bears! One of my favourite Steiff teddy bears is their 1st World War-time paper plush bear, incredibly rare and here you see a little group of six of them!! Wow! – I have to stop here on Steiff bears it's almost





too much! One final word on this famous firm, as you know my main interests are animals, Steiff making perhaps the finest selection ever, here you will see the most beautiful examples in exceptional condition.

I now recall with great fondness another ex-Christie's lot, the most stunning and vivid blue Schuco teddy bear, original from the Schuco archives which were sold in London originally at the end of the 1970s I believe, this is probably the best Schuco teddy bear it is possible to own.

Top of my current wish list of bears I want to add to my collections is the English firm Harwin's Ally Bear, leafing through the wonderful museum guide they have three of the rare beauties photographed. I wonder if they could spare me one?

I could fill this whole magazine with details of bears in the collection, but they represent all the

main bear manufacturing companies from around the world, England, Germany, France and America; and have some of the finest examples of Cramer, Bing, Merrythought, Schuco, Ideal, Jopi, Farnell to name just a few.

If you don't or can't get to Basel; something I love doing on a quiet afternoon is visiting the museum's very good website and clicking on their 'Special Exhibition' page and then click on the link 'Archive Through 2016'. Since 2001 the museum has been putting on 3 or 6 special exhibitions a year, on the website you can get a glimpse of how wonderful these have been. In 2007 on wheeled soft toys, 2009 an amazing one on Margarete Steiff and perhaps

my favourite in 2003 a real gem: a mechanical Steiff showpiece originally produced in 1928 and at the time comprising of 47 Steiff animals including the most amazing bird minstrels. Some of the figures



were fitted with special mechanical devices to enable them to move. How on earth did this survive!

Now it has been some seventeen years since I have visited and I know their collection has grown and flourished, many pieces from the Greenwood Collections which I sold at Christie's in 2010 have ended up there and I keep seeing Facebook posts of some truly wonderful artist bear creations being acquired! How forward thinking of the museum to be collecting these.

I am long over due a new visit, I will have to think of a good excuse to head down to Switzerland.. chocolate? A retreat? Fondue? Or just teddy bears?

Hilary and I are delighted that the most important bear museum in the world (sorry Hilary you have

a little way to go) has reached a 20 year milestone and would like to congratulate them.

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