

A hub for the world's contemporary shadow players

The traditional shadow play in South-East Asia has a tradition of more than 1000 years and is known worldwide. The modern shadow theater, as played in North and South America, Japan, Australia and Europe, is completely different. The art of modern shadow theater literally stood "in the shadows" for centuries up until the 1970s. Then came the big turning point. Like the phoenix rising from the ashes, the shadow theater swung into the light. How did that happen?

Astonishingly, the initial impetus for reunification caused a technical invention. In 1959, Elmar Fridrich and Emmet Wiley brought the energy-saving halogen lamp onto the market in the USA. The previous light bulb was obsolete.

In the 1970s, several shadow players in Europe began to experiment with halogen lamps at the same time and without knowing about each other. These emitted their light from a tiny point. In contrast to the previous incandescent lamp, they allowed the shadow figures to be lifted off the screen without the shadow losing much of its sharpness. You could play in the room. Depending on the distance between the figures and the screen, the shadows grew to be gigantic or shrank to tiny ones. That was tantamount to a revolution. The previous two-dimensional silhouette game became a three-dimensional shadow game. The shadow was freed from its centuries-old shackles and given breathtaking dynamics. An independent European form of shadow theater was born: the so-called contemporary shadow theater.

But it didn't stop there. The shadow players' thirst for knowledge knew no bounds.

- The traditional rectangular screen gave way to moving trapezoidal, triangular, circular shapes.
- The separation of players and audience caused by the screen has been abandoned. The spectators could watch the animators at work.
- Other arts such as pantomime, dance, music, acting, film were included in the shadow play.

What was still missing, however, was a central location where these innovations could be presented to a larger audience. A podium on which the shadow players of the world could meet, get to know each other, discuss and make friendships that unite peoples. And this place was found.

In 1988 the world's 1st International Shadow Theater Festival was held in the German town of Schwäbisch Gmünd. Thousands of spectators came from all over the world and were enthusiastic about the new technical and artistic possibilities of contemporary shadow theater.

A year later, a contact and research center was set up in cooperation with the world association of puppeteers, UNIMA. Contemporary shadow theater was researched here and the results published in 4 books. A fruitful exchange of ideas between the shadow players



01



02



03



04



05

began.

The head of the center has repeatedly received shadow figures as a thank you for his voluntary work. The desire arose to exhibit them in a museum. However, this museum should not be one of the usual museums in which one showcase stands next to the other. No, it should be an interactive museum, a so-called hands-on museum. In it, visitors should encounter the phenomenon of light and shadow. And they should do something: experiment, research, be amazed, draw their own conclusions.

Thanks to the active support of a mayor who is very interested in culture, the wish came true. In October 2021, the unique museum for contemporary shadow theater was opened in Schwäbisch Gmünd. And best of all: families with children and young people also visit the museum.



06



07

The International Shadow Theater Festival will be held for the 12th time from 7th to 13th October this year in Schwäbisch Gmünd. If you, dear reader, would like to get to know the "capital of contemporary shadow theatre", as Schwäbisch Gmünd is called, you are very welcome.

Contact: kulturbuero@schwaebisch-gmuend.de

Shadow theater ensembles can apply to festival director Sybille Hirtzel at schattentheater@schwaebisch-gmuend.de

You can find out more about contemporary shadow theater at „[www. schattentheater.de](http://www.schattentheater.de)“

Rainer Reusch