

Press Kit

ERICH WONDER – SETS OF WONDER FOR HEINER MÜLLER

Exhibition

16 January – 13 March 2022

Akademie der Künste, Pariser Platz 4, 10117 Berlin

Press conference

Friday, 14 January 2022, 11 am

With **Jeanine Meerapfel**, President of the Akademie der Künste; **Werner Heegewaldt**, Director of the Archives of the Akademie der Künste; **Stephan Suschke**, Curator of the exhibition; **Stephan Dörschel**, Head of Department Performing Arts Archives

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Information about the Exhibition

Title	ERICH WONDER – SETS OF WONDER FOR HEINER MÜLLER
Venue	Akademie der Künste, Pariser Platz 4, 10117 Berlin
Duration	16 January – 13 March 2022
Opening Hours	Tue – Sun 11 am – 7 pm
Admission	9 / 6 € Free admission for all visitors under 19, Tuesdays from 3 pm and every first Sunday of the month
Opening day	Sunday, 16 January 2022 11 am – 7 pm, free admission with time slot ticket
Guided Tours	Tue and Thu at 5 pm As well as Staged Tours, see Education Programme All tours: 3 € plus exhibition ticket of the day
Information about Health and Safety Regulations	https://www.adk.de/en/information/health-regulations.htm
Website	www.adk.de
Media partners	arte, Das Magazin, Deutsches Theater Berlin, nachtkritik.de, rbbKultur, taz, Theater der Zeit, Yorck Kinogruppe

Team

Overall responsibility	Werner Heegewaldt
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Project management	Stephan Dörschel
Project cooperation	Silke Lipert, Anneka Metzger, Susan Todd
Spatial concept	Grischa Meyer
Graphic design	Patricia Haas
Film	Peter Badel
Sound	Joachim Werner
Prop construction	Corinna Gassauer
Exhibitor design and realisation	Stefan Dening, Hanna Dettner, Roswitha Kötz, Sabine Römer, Jörg Scheil, Isabel Schlenther, Mauve Weinzierl with Act!worX, Mount Berlin, Villa Schmück Dich, visionB
Registrars	Catherine Amé, Nadja Bender
Editing	Uta Grundmann, Wendy Wallis (EN)
Translations	Tim Chafer, Simon Cowper (Exhibition texts and accompanying booklet)
Cultural education programme	Marion Neumann, Rolf Giegold, Stefanie Kuhn, Alistair Matthiesen
Communications	Stephanie Eck, Jeanette Gonsior, Marianne König, Marc Mayer, Anette Schmitt, Freya Treutmann, Dorothea Walther, Mareike Wenzlau

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Federal Government Commissioner
for Culture and the Media



Press Release

“And every Sunday we present the invisible.”

In 1977, 33-year-old Erich Wonder met Heiner Müller, 15 years his senior, for the first time at Schauspiel Frankfurt. A close working friendship quickly developed between the Austrian stage designer with an extraordinary visual language and Germany's most controversial playwright, who had deliberately chosen to live in East Germany although his plays were repeatedly banned by its cultural bureaucrats. Lasting until Müller's death in 1995, their collaboration brought forth spectacular productions. The two artists were influenced by very different political and aesthetic experiences, a disparity that became a productive driving force behind their collaboration. Their work set standards because, in an aesthetically breathtaking way, it reflected the political developments in divided and reunified Germany.

Their first joint theatre collaboration – *Der Auftrag*, a play about revolution, betrayal and death – came to fruition in 1982 at the Schauspielhaus Bochum. For his 1988 production *Der Lohndrucker*, a "production piece" from the early days of East Germany, Müller brought the stage designer to the Deutsches Theater Berlin, Wonder's first encounter with the other German state. One week after East Germany's first free elections, *Hamlet/Maschine* also premiered there in March 1990; the 8-hour performance became a theatrical requiem for the state in its process of demise. Their final joint project, Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, celebrated an equally polarising and much-acclaimed premiere at the Bayreuth Festival in 1993.

Marking the acquisition of Erich Wonder's artistic archive by the Akademie der Künste, which has also been preserving Heiner Müller's literary estate since 1998, this exhibition makes these work processes visible and reminds us of an unusual friendship between artists.

Curator's text on the exhibition

Awakening a yearning for a different state of the world. The congenial collaboration between Erich Wonder and Heiner Müller

Heiner Müller and Erich Wonder met for the first time in the mid-1970s at the municipal theatre Schauspiel Frankfurt. This led to an extraordinary working friendship that was to last until Müller's death. Frankfurt am Main – where Wonder was engaged as a stage designer at Schauspiel Frankfurt from 1972 to 1978 – had a formative influence on him: "Frankfurt was the decisive factor for me. We really got about back then, lived in the station district but travelled to the outskirts of the city. It was quite an experience to bring this aesthetic into the theatre. It had to do with the light, which wasn't usual for the time – an aesthetic of bringing inside all the action from outside." All of this happened against a backdrop of the demonstrations and brutal street clashes that made political and aesthetic certainties obsolete. Theatre-makers also opened themselves up to the reality going on outside, and, like Wonder, imported the reality into the huge boxes of the municipal playhouses. The American cinema of the late 1960s and early 1970s had a marked aesthetic impact on this. Stanley Kubrick and Martin Scorsese discovered the artificial light of the city: "Colourful, aggressive, flickering neon lights, snack bars at night, murky gambling dens, bare light bulbs dangling from slim cables – all these were among the impressions that caught you by surprise visually, spatially and physically." Wonder absorbed these impressions and expanded the theatre's visual toolkit by using special spotlights. This period also saw the beginning of seminal working relationships with Luc Bondy and Jürgen Flimm. With these two, as well as directors – the likes of Hans Neuenfels, Ruth Berghaus, and Peter Mussbach – he conquered Europe's theatre and opera stages for many years to come.

The first performance of a play by the East German playwright Heiner Müller in West Germany was *Philoktet* at Munich's Residenztheater in 1968. At the beginning of the 1970s, Ruth Berghaus at the Berliner Ensemble and Benno Besson at the Volksbühne staged several productions by Müller, who had been banned several times by East Germany's cultural bureaucrats. Müller soon became the foremost playwright, the most controversial contemporary writer in both parts of Germany. Wonder and Müller meeting for the first time in 1977 was a unique encounter between two exceptional artists who normally would have remained separated by the Iron Curtain: a highly talented man in his mid-thirties from Burgenland in Austria met the almost 50-year-old Müller from Saxony; they soon started working on joint projects. The first of these came about in March 1979 at the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus: *Rosebud*, performed by the actor Fritz Schemm, on a stage designed by Wonder, was a collaged rendition of Wonder's dreams with literary set pieces by Müller, including an excerpt from *Die Hamletmaschine*.

Their first theatre collaboration came to fruition in 1982 at the Schauspielhaus Bochum. *Der Auftrag* was a play about revolution, betrayal, and death: "It was the overriding idea of Wonder, the stage designer in Bochum, that you have to make it clear to the audience that they are voyeurs. Voyeurs can never see everything they want to see. So, we designed a space that excludes the audience from the action again and again."

Since Wonder needed "independent projects" in order to "survive artistically" in a theatre world in overdrive, he repeatedly worked in public space at a distance from theatres, for example, at documenta in 1987 – *Maelstromsüdpol*, a performance for which Müller wrote a text set to music by Heiner Goebbels. Adapted to play at different venues, this work was also performed on the Landwehr Canal in Berlin and at the VOEST works in Linz.

In 1986, Müller was offered a production at the Deutsches Theater Berlin. To the surprise of the theatre's director Dieter Mann, he proposed *Der Lohndrucker* (*The Scab*), a "production piece" from East Germany's early years that seemed to have little to do with the current issues of the time. From the outset, Müller wanted to engage Wonder – who had neither visited East Germany nor seen an East German factory – for this production. The production celebrated its premiere at the Deutsches Theater Berlin in 1988.

Wonder designed an alien world hovering between archaic scenery and a high-tech future. The oven, which was to become a fiery furnace on set, played a key role in the stage design. In Wonder's interpretation, the set was a cross between a tank turret and a bunker, the continuation of war by other means. Müller's associations were "oven = Auschwitz = Chernobyl".

Müller took stock in the face of East Germany's incipient death throes. A play that intended to lend impetus to the building of the state became, Müller explained with reference to his own production, "the diagnosis of a congenital disorder that had developed into an incurable disease of this structure, of this society".

Preparations for their second joint production at the Deutsches Theater – *Hamlet/Maschine* – got under way in February 1989. The desolate economic and political conditions in East Germany, the flood of people leaving the country, and the fall of the Berlin Wall were the foil for rehearsals. By the time, after almost seven months, the premiere took place on 24 March 1990, East Germany's demise had already been sealed by the first free elections a week earlier. Thus, the eight-hour production became a requiem for a state in the process of extinction. In an initial conversation, Müller described the stage design somewhat flippantly as "from ice cube to stock cube". Wonder translated the play into a stage set of shifting climates. Müller commented, "The next century is bound to be a century of climate disasters [...]. It will start in the ice and end in the desert."

On 16 May 1992, another intervention/performance – *Das Auge des Taifun (The Eye of the Typhoon)* – took place on the Burgring in Vienna, which Wonder described as a "movement of baroque stage machinery". Müller proposed texts by Pliny the Younger and Adalbert Stifter woven into a music collage by Blixa Bargeld for the Einstürzende Neubauten.

Their final joint project took them to Bayreuth. In *Tristan und Isolde*, Müller called into question the romanticised love affair between the couple; he was interested in the coldness of love in a militaristic male world that results in isolation, which found expression in the production in spacious interiors in Wonder's cool, monochrome set designs. The premiere in 1993 at the Bayreuth Festival divided an audience already accustomed to scandal. The performance was cheered and booed, before it attracted acclaim in the ensuing years and gained legendary status.

The secret of the Wonder–Müller collaboration lay in their respect for each other's autonomy: in Wonder, Müller had found a set designer in whose stage designs his texts could "rest"; and in Müller, Wonder had found a director who allowed his set designs their own dynamic, taking them as an opportunity for playful thinking rather than functionally constraining them. Müller suited the self-conception of Wonder's that: "I want to zoom into the sets. I want the close-up on stage. That's why I see myself as a camera operator who builds spaces, and the opposite of an architect who designs static buildings."

While Müller had been searching, both thematically and technically, since the 1960s, for structures in his theatre texts that reflected an increasingly complex reality, Wonder brought this reality into the theatre on the visual level. Neither of them was concerned with realistic representation, always only with artificial translation. To them, their collaborative theatre evenings were all about creating an alternative world that made you want to question the existing one.

Stephan Suschke

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Short biographies

Heiner Müller

*1929 in Eppendorf / Saxony, † 1995 in Berlin

Playwright, poet and director. One of the foremost German-language authors and intellectuals of the 20th century. Due to publication and production bans in East Germany, much of Müller's work was first published in West Germany before it could be staged in East Germany. In his texts, Müller addresses the contexts and ruptures in German history. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, he was artistic director of the Berliner Ensemble and President of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin (East).

Erich Wonder

*1944 in Jennersdorf / Burgenland

After graduating, he was an assistant at the playhouse in Bremen before becoming one of Europe's outstanding stage designers at Schauspiel Frankfurt from 1972, working with such directors as Ruth Berghaus, Luc Bondy and Jürgen Flimm. Frankfurt am Main with its social conflict and urban light was formative for Wonder. Influenced by American films that discovered the artificial light of cities for their aesthetics, Wonder expanded theatre's visual toolkit by using special spotlights.

Stephan Suschke

*1958 in Weimar

Studied theatre at the Humboldt University Berlin. From 1987 to 1991 work as assistant director on Heiner Müller's productions at the Deutsches Theater Berlin. In 1992 he moved with Heiner Müller to the Berliner Ensemble, where he directed from 1994. In 1995 he became a member of the management, after Heiner Müller's death in 1996 deputy artistic director and from 1997 to 1999 artistic director of the Berliner Ensemble. From 1999 freelance director and author. Since the 2016/2017 season, acting director at the Landestheater Linz.

Events

On-site events

Public events at Akademie der Künste, Pariser Platz 4, 10117 Berlin

Sunday, 16 January 2022, 11 am –7 pm, free admission with a time slot ticket

Opening Day

Saturday, 5 February, 8 pm, € 6/4 or admission with exhibition ticket of the day

Artist Talk: Spaces for actors

Talk with Jürgen Flimm, Mark Lammert, Annette Murschetz. Presenter: Stephan Suschke

Stage designers create spaces in which actors find themselves in their roles and transmit this credibly to an audience. How much is the stage design influenced by the directorial concept? How do visual artists deal with this task of designing spaces for actors? And what was special about Erich Wonder's collaboration with the playwright Heiner Müller?

Sunday, 13 March, 7 pm, € 6/4 or admission with exhibition ticket of the day

Closing Ceremony: Actors in stage settings by Erich Wonder

Film screening *Der Lohndrucker* and *Hamlet/Maschine* and talk with Hermann Beyer, Dagmar Manzel (tbc.), Grischa Meyer, Christoph Rüter and Johanna Schall. Presenter: Thomas Irmer

Actors and staff remember working together with Erich Wonder and Heiner Müller on *Der Lohndrucker* and *Hamlet/Maschine* at the Deutsches Theater Berlin.

Education Programme KUNSTWELTEN

Guided tours

Regular guided tours

With limited number of participants | Tuesdays + Thursdays 5 pm

A DREAMER IS A GENIUS – Staged tours

With Kerstin Hensel and students of the School of Dramatic Arts Ernst Busch

Wednesday, 19 January 2022, 12 noon + 1 pm

Sunday, 6 February 2022, 11 am + 12 noon

Sunday, 20 February 2022, 11 am + 12 noon

Wednesday, 9. March 2022, 12 noon + 1 pm

In addition to the regular guided tour programme, KUNSTWELTEN offers special tours of ERICH WONDER – SETS OF WONDER FOR HEINER MÜLLER in English, for visually impaired, blind and deaf visitors as well as for school classes prior to registration.

All tours € 3 plus exhibition ticket

Workshops

Espen Eichhöfer, Annett Gröschner, Moritz Nitsche, Kristiane Petersmann and other artists invite children and adolescents to take part in image, photography and theatre workshops.

Further information: www.adk.de/en/academy/kunstwelten/

Press Photos

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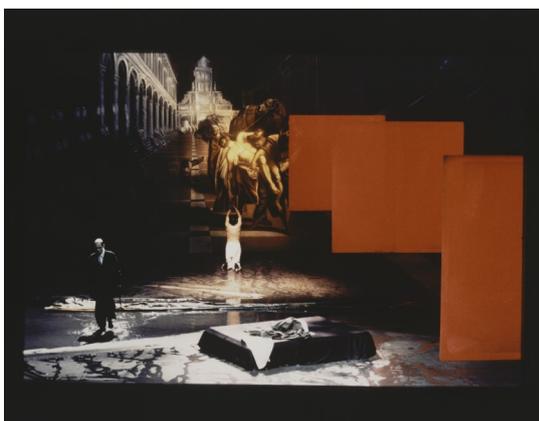
Heiner Müller: *Der Lohndrucker*, Berlin, Deutsches Theater, 1988
Hermann Beyer, Michael Gwisdek, Ulrich Mühe (from left to right)
Photo © Sibylle Bergemann – Ostkreuz



Heiner Müller: *Der Lohndrucker*, Berlin, Deutsches Theater, 1988
Rehearsal, stage set-up, in the middle Erich Wonder
Photo © Sibylle Bergemann – Ostkreuz,
Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Erich Wonder Archive



Heiner Müller: *Der Lohndrucker*, Berlin, Deutsches Theater, 1988
Directing team with technical staff, in the middle Heiner Müller and Erich Wonder
Photo © Sibylle Bergemann – Ostkreuz,
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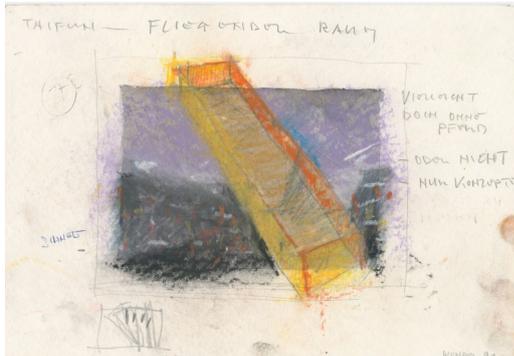
William Shakespeare/Heiner Müller: *Hamlet/Maschine*, Berlin, Deutsches Theater, 1990
Ulrich Mühe (Hamlet), Margarita Broich (Ophelia)
Photo © Estate Sibylle Bergemann

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Erich Wonder
 Sketch for *Das Auge des Taifun*, Vienna, 1992
 © Erich Wonder, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Erich Wonder Archive



Erich Wonder
 Sketch for *Das Auge des Taifun*, Vienna, 1992
 © Erich Wonder, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Erich Wonder Archive



Erich Wonder
NACHT(T)RAUM
 Acrylic on canvas
 © Erich Wonder



Heiner Müller with Erich Wonder during rehearsals for *Hamlet/Maschine* in the stalls of the Deutsches Theater Berlin, 1990
 Photo: Maria Steinfeldt, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Maria Steinfeldt Archive