

OBITUARIES

WERNER NEKES

(1944–2017)

A MASTER OF THE DECEPTIVE ARTS

Dick Balzer

Sadly Werner Nekes passed away on 22 January 2017. Nekes was already a well-known German experimental filmmaker when he began collecting 'pre-cinema' devices in the early 1970s. He became one of the giants in the field, a collector in the long tradition of collectors such as Will Day and Bill and John Barnes.

Werner did not give magic lantern shows but he was certainly a showman and an impresario. He found ingenious ways to share his collection, beginning with a series of six videos that he began making in 1986, called *Media Magica (Film before Film)*.

In 1993 he sold a significant part of his collection to the Getty Center of the History of Art and the Humanities. The collection was the centre of the Getty's ambitious and very successful exhibition *Devices of Wonder*.

Money never seemed to rest long in Werner's pocket and so almost without missing a beat, he began rebuilding his collection and, over time, he built up an even more amazing collection. He no longer sought a permanent home for this but instead began creating his own travelling exhibitions. Over the last twenty years his

collection has been shown in museums across Europe and in Australia.

Magic Lantern Society members will recall the stunning exhibition – *Eyes, Lies and Illusions* – which showcased 1,000 items from his collection at the Hayward Gallery in London in 2004. In the show's accompanying catalogue Laurent Mannoni wrote an article entitled 'The Deceptive Art'. The title captures both the broad interest of Werner's collecting and something about Werner himself.

Werner was a long-time member of the Magic Lantern Society and a frequent attendee of meetings and international conventions in England and around the continent. Nekes and his wife Ursula Richert-Nekes could always be found in the back of the hall or outside so that Werner could have a smoke. Wherever or whenever you encountered Werner he always carried one or more new additions to his collection, tucked away in a jacket pocket or inside the bag he carried. He was always eager to show you these new acquisitions.

Werner was generous with his time and knowledge. One of the great pleasures for a true collector was to visit him in his home-museum in Mülheim an der Ruhr. His collection was housed in the basement of a reconfigured industrial building. There wasn't much in the way of creature comforts, with precious little space taken up by the kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms. The space was dominated by Werner and his incredible collection. Sooner or later, drink in hand, with a cigarette not far away, Werner would settle in a chair and then the night's entertainment began. He was a voracious reader and had a remarkable collection of books from the sixteenth through to the nineteenth century. Every discussion was interrupted to fetch books that either helped explain a concept or raised a new question. It was always an extraordinary and entertaining evening. Sleep seemed the least interesting thing to do.

Werner will be deeply missed.



JACK JUDSON

(1927–2017)

COLLECTOR EXTRAORDINAIRE



Another great collector also sadly passed away in January – Jack Judson, a past president and pillar of the Magic Lantern Society of United States and Canada and long-time member of our Society too. His collection of 100,000 magic lanterns, slides, readings and related apparatus, ephemera, paintings and printed items is believed to be the largest in the world. The earliest items date from the eighteenth century and the latest from the 1900s.

All the items are housed in Judson's Magic Lantern Castle in San Antonio, Texas, which opened in spring 1992. This has over 4,000 square feet of exhibition space as well as an auditorium that seats fifty people. To Jack's knowledge, this is the only museum in the world dedicated solely to the magic lantern. Here also Jack repaired and conserved magic lantern material and in 1998, based on his own experience, published *A Guide to Restoration and Preservation of Magic Lanterns and Lantern Slides for the Caring Collector*.

According to his family, Jack's interest in projection may have dated from his World War II service in the US Navy when he volunteered as a projectionist aboard ship – a role that brought extra pay, extra freedom and a Jeep to pick up the films. While working for USAA he bought his first magic lantern at a street market in London – although it turned out to be an enlarger. When he retired from

USAA he began collecting in earnest and built up the extraordinary collection in the Magic Lantern Castle today.

John Townsend writes: 'I am so glad that both Jacqueline and I took the opportunity of visiting Jack and Linde last October, when over in the States for the US and Canada Lantern Convention in New Orleans. We planned a whistle-stop tour of all points west but wanted to go via San Antonio to see Jack and his Magic Lantern Castle Museum.

'We spent a memorable couple of days with Jack and Linde and they were the perfect hosts as we celebrated his eighty-ninth birthday with him. The museum was incredible and I was at long last re-united with a rather magnificent triunial I sold to him some twenty years ago which now sits in pride of place in his collection. He had a further four triunials either in the museum or in his storage facility – which he allowed us to view – including an amazing metal one with copper embossed door panels.

'Apart from guiding us around the museum, he also rather alarmingly demonstrated what limelight would have actually looked like by firing one up with oxygen and hydrogen! All in all, it was well worth the detour and I will forever hold dear the memories of a quite remarkable, charming and generous man.'

