

THE WERNER NEKES CONFERENCE

Gwen Sebus and Michael van de Leur

On 28 April 2024 we traveled to Schloss Wahn near Köln (Cologne), Germany, where the this conference would take place under the appropriate title *Die Geschichte der Bilder in den Blick nehme* ('Taking a look at the history of images'). This three-day event was organised to mark the 80th birthday of **Werner Nekes**, who died in 2017 (see *TML* 10, p. 14). Of course we had known Werner, the collector and



Werner Nekes – film-maker, scholar and collector extraordinaire

film-maker, who was a member of the MLS for many years. We used to meet him two or three times a year, at the Photographic Fair in the Netherlands, in Bièvres, at the Collectors' Fair in Utrecht or at meetings of the MLS.

Werner's collection was legendary. Before the start of the programme, we were able to view an exhibition of a number of objects from the collection. There we soon encountered a number of Belgian, German and Austrian members of the MLS, including **Helmut Wälde**, **Bernd Scholze**, **Ivo Gilbert**, **Bart Moens**, **Kurt Vanhoutte**, **Nele Wynants**, **Ditmar Bollaert** and **Felix Cikanek** among others. For us, the exhibition was a real celebration of recognition with peepshow boxes, magic lanterns, prints, etc. There were many objects that we would have liked to take home to add to our own collection.

Peter Marx welcomed the guests and told us how, after seven years, he had been able to oversee the final distribution of Werner Nekes' collection of 25,000 objects between three institutions: the Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung (Theatre Studies Collection) of the University of Köln, the Film Museum in Potsdam and the German Film Institute and Film Museum in Frankfurt. The guest of honour that afternoon was Werner's widow **Ursula ('Uschi') Richert-Nekes**, who made the distribution possible.

The welcome and opening lecture took place in an 18th-century room where the walls were beautiful painted with, appropriately, an image of a peepshow on one wall. After brief words of welcome by our



Bernd Scholze and Felix Cikanek admire Werner's Fantasmagoria Lantern at the exhibition



Michael van de Leur, Helmut Wälde and Uschi Richert-Nekes in conversation

Vermittlung ('On the Pedagogical Potential of Media Magica for Early Childhood Education') by Henrike Okrent, suggesting that children should not be forgotten in enabling wider access to the Werner Nekes collection.

After the lunch break it was Mary Borgo Ton's turn, with a look at *Media Archaeology in the Age of AI*, in which she showed that using computer AI searches gave surprising results. Fellow MLS member Martin Loiperdinger talked on *Chromatropen und Nebelbilder – Kino vor dem Kino in der Sammlung Werner Nekes* ('Chromatropes and Dissolving Views: Film Before Film in the Werner Nekes Collection'). Stefanie Plappert discussed the exhibition of the collection in *Back to the Future! Die Sammlung Werner Nekes ausstellen* ('Back to the Future! Exhibiting the Werner Nekes Collection'), followed by Erkki Huhtamo who gave a glimpse into his own collection with his *The Logic of Collecting*.



Bernd Scholze and Ivo Gilbert at work



Bernd and his double lantern

hosts Peter Marx, Barbara Zierys and Thomas Worschech, Professor Dr Siegfried Zielinski took the stage to sketch a vivid picture of Nekes' film work. He also discussed Werner's collecting passion, travelling to antique shops and markets throughout Europe to supplement his collection, at a time when there were still specialised antique shops or markets where something could be picked up.

This reminded Gwen of the time, more than 20 years ago, when MLS members visited the Cinematek in Brussels. At the hotel in the evening, the collectors present discussed whether to visit the famous Sablon antique market early the next morning, before the day's programme began. The next morning, before breakfast had even started, Werner returned from the Sablon with a so-called 'seditious cane' in his hand. At the MLS meeting this cane attracted jealous looks from all the other collectors, and is now included in the exhibition.

The next day's programme, held at the Fritz Thyssen Foundation in Köln, was filled with lectures covering the fields of film, magic lanterns and slides, media archeology and, of course, the Werner Nekes collection.

Nele Wynants started the day with her lecture *Unveiling the Vanishing Lady Illusion*. Ladies not only disappeared, they were also sawn in half. Despite these unfriendly actions to women, the lecture was very entertaining. Next was a lecture by Michael Wedel, *Zwischen den Bildern des neuen deutschen Films – Uliisses und Der Stand der Dinge um 1980* ('Between the Images of the New German Cinema – Uliisses and The State of Things Around 1980'), which was interesting because Nekes' film work had always been unknown to us. The morning continued with a lecture by Kristina Köhler, *Handarbeit. Zum gestschen Programm der Experimentalfilme von Werner Nekes* ('Handmade: On the Current Programme of Experimental Films by Werner Nekes') followed by *Zum pädagogischen Potential der Media Magica für die frühkindliche*



Detail of the peepshow painting on the wall in the Schloss Wahn



Bernd showing his Fantasmagoria lantern

Naturally, all present were looking forward to Bernd Scholze's evening performance *An Evening Reminiscent of the Art of Hand-Painted Magic Lantern Slides*, which he gave with Ivo Gilbert as assistant. The performance featured German 18th-century long slides, produced by John Bleuler from Augsburg and by Wilhelm Bruckner and Johan Friedrich, both from Nürnberg, followed by a selection of 18th-century slides from around the world. We know some of the highlights of Bernd's collection, but we were surprised, just like the other connoisseurs present, by the versatility of the projected slides.

At the end of the performance, Bernd demonstrated his phantasmagoria lantern, for which he had made a moving chassis for the occasion – a special end to a very successful and perfectly organised day.

The third day was dedicated to optical devices and the traditional Indian puppet theatre. Unfortunately we were unable to attend this part, but at least we had been able to admire the shadow puppets from the Nekes Collection in the exhibition earlier. We are already looking forward to the next celebration.

Photos of the event by Gwen Sebus