

## Press release

5<sup>th</sup> August 2008, Wismar

# European wooden toys – very popular in Asia

Exhibition displaying the lifework of the toy maker Kurt Naef

The Swiss toy maker Kurt Naef was one of the key figures of the 20th century regarding the development of international toy culture. His wooden toys have been produced in central Europe for over 50 years, predominantly handcrafted. However, the rattles, spinning tops, marble runs and building blocks with their bright colours and precise workmanship are particularly capturing the imagination of more and more Japanese children. By playing with them children get a feel for colours, shapes and proportions, refine their motor skills and practise thinking in a three dimensional way.

Whereas the interest from abroad for special wooden toys from our cultural sphere is growing, it's becoming more and more difficult in Germany to find such high quality goods on the market. The fate of Kurt Naef's toys is the same as that of some manufacturers in the Erzgebirge, Saxony. For the most part, the toys are sold abroad as there is great demand for them there.

Kurt Naef spent much of his life discussing toys with designers from all over the world and was always willing to put their good ideas into practice and incorporate these into his range of products. His motto "toys must have a soul" was his decisive criteria when choosing which designs to produce. Peer Clahsen, Roger Pfund, Jo Niemeyer, Sabu Oguro, Verner Panton, Tomi Ungerer and Antonio Vitali are just a few of the designers whose designs were brought to life through Kurt Naef. Together they created small works of art which the Museum of Modern Art paid tribute to as early as 1968. Naef's extensive quality requirements regarding design, function and implementation also made his toys the first world wide collectors item.

In 1977 Naef was one of the first producers to reinvent Bauhaus designs. It is thanks to his initiative that several Bauhaus games are still being exclusively produced by Naef Spiele AG. Amongst them is the well known Bauhaus chess set by Josef Hartwig and the building game which Alma Siedhoff-Buscher designed for the children's bedroom in the Weimar show house 'Am Horn'.

Kurt Naef died on 30th November 2006. The Förderverein Museum für Ostdeutsches Design pays tribute to his lifework through the exhibition

### **Kurt Naef – Der Spielzeugmacher – The Toymaker**

The exhibition is displaying over 200 toys and prototypes in examples of German and international toy fashion of the 20th century. The exhibits display Naef's creativity and skilled craftsmanship which will tempt you to play as "playing is not a question of age" (Kurt Naef).

From 3rd September to 2nd November 08  
Open daily from 10 am to 6 pm – free entry  
In Kulturforum Kirche St. Georgen  
Bliedenstraße 40, 23966 Wismar

**Official opening 3rd September 08, 7 pm**

The book 'Kurt Naef – Der Spielzeugmacher – The Toymaker', published by Birkhäuser, serves as an exhibition catalogue. This publication also accompanied the 2006 exhibition of the same name in the Baden Toy Museum in Switzerland to celebrate Naef's 80th birthday.

For further information visit:  
[www.naef-in-wismar.de](http://www.naef-in-wismar.de)  
[www.naefspiele.ch](http://www.naefspiele.ch)  
[www.nikitiki.co.jp](http://www.nikitiki.co.jp)

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### **Förderverein Museum für Ostdeutsches Design e.V.**

The Förderverein 'Museum für Ostdeutsches Design e.V.' was founded in October 2006 in Schwerin. The managing committee, with Rolf Podlasly as its chairman, is supported by an advisory board, of which the well known publicist Günter Höhne from Berlin is a member. The aim of the association is to carry out more research regarding the history of East German design, beginning with the Werkbund (German Work Federation) and the Bauhaus era. The history of 20th century German design is an important part of the international development of formation and design. However, the East German contribution is still not as well accounted for. The association already possesses extensive and attractive exhibits of East German design tradition and is in search of premises for a permanent exhibition as well as temporary exhibition.

### **Kurt Naef (1926 – 2006)**

Kurt Naef was born on 4th May 1926 in Eptingen, Switzerland. Growing up in rural surroundings, Kurt Naef trained as cabinet maker at the age of 16 in Olten and afterwards studied interior design at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Basel and Amsterdam. In 1952, together with his wife Alice, he opened his first shop for interior design and art and crafts in Basel. He designed furniture and his first toys from 1956. In 1967 Naef opened his first toy factory in Zeiningen near Basel where he produced his own designs and toy ideas for designers from all over the world for almost 25 years. Awards from around the globe, an exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1968 and increasing international success of his Naef-Spiele company have made him one of the best known producers of highly educational toys. Due to personal reasons he sold the Naef-Spiele AG in 1992 and moved to France with his second wife Lotti. He remained connected with Naef-Spiele and after economic turbulence in the 90s he personally campaigned for the continuation of his life work. Kurt Naef died on 30th November 2006. His firm is known today as Naef Spiele AG and is managed by the son of his wife Lotti, Hans-Peter Engler.