

**10th International Interim Conference on Plastination
Toledo, Ohio, USA,
July 9-12, 2011**

Letter from Gunther von Hagens

Dear good old friends and dear beginners of Plastination:

I am here as a participant of this 10th interim conference of Plastination, which is for me a kind of farewell party. This does not mean that I plan to cease attending future Plastination conferences. I value the intellectual enrichment, the renewal of friendships that span nearly three decades, and the company of my peers in Plastination, that this conference affords me. However, as some of you know, I have been grappling with the challenges of Parkinson's disease that has affected me in ways too many to count. It has affected my body, altered the shape of my life, and changed the course of my work. The most precious commodity for me now is time, and I have been compelled to ask myself, "What is worth doing?" I decided after long contemplation that I wish to harness and channel my creative energy and scientific impulses towards work that is fulfilling, and that I wish to leave as my legacy to public anatomy and plastination science.



With this imperative established, I decided to delegate the day to day management, development, and leadership of the endeavor I began half a life ago, to three people who I know will strive to carry the banner of plastination, and be the keepers of the flame, of the science that I invented.

First of all, I would like to pay tribute to my wife, Dr. Angelina Whalley, who gave up her intended career as a surgeon back in 1995 to work with me to develop Plastination to what it is today. Today she is the curator and main media spokesperson of the Body Worlds exhibitions, and the owner and Managing Director of the Institute for Plastination in Heidelberg and Biodur® Products, a company we founded in 1978 to meet the growing demand for polymers and equipment from practitioners of Plastination.

Secondly, I would like to recognize my son, Rurik von Hagens, who transitioned from a career in business administration in Germany and the UK to assume a leadership role in our company. As our Commercial Director, I trust him implicitly to guide our endeavors into the next decade and beyond. His financial experience is an asset to our organization which underwrites its own research activities without external funding.

Finally, I would like to introduce Dr. Vladimir Chereminsky to you. Vladimir is currently leading our Plastination Department in Dalian, China and will assume the same role in Guben, Germany. He is, unquestionably, my best scholar in Plastination, and I am very glad of his work to come in Guben and his help in presenting my work to you today.

It is inevitable that I talk of death when I talk about anatomy. The older I get, the more I believe that death is completely normal and that it is life that is exceptional. To understand life, it is helpful to embrace death. As an anatomist and plastinator, I have the privilege to be closer to death than others. Whenever I plastinated someone younger than me, I experienced death mentally with such intensity, that I no longer fear death. I believe that fearing my own mortality would require me also to mourn those who have been never been born. This insight has been quite valuable as I live with a progressive and incurable disease. It is not that I expect to die soon, but that accepting death as normal and accepting the inevitable degeneration of bodily strength and capabilities is a kind of liberation. In addition, I feel consoled about my mortality, because I am a body donor, extending my body's life. Foreseeing that my body will be transformed by Plastination from an object of individual mourning into an object of appreciation, enlightenment and learning is the great consolation of my life.

Fortunately, unlike in Alzheimer's disease, my mind remains healthy and vigilant. This will enable me to finalize ongoing research projects as well as to begin new endeavors. I am occupied now with a new trajectory in plastination, focused on aesthetics and gestalt forms that I call, Sci-Art, through which I plan to revive the renaissance based art of creating anatomical masterpieces using Plastination.

Let me close my message to you with what was always dear to my heart: the democratization of anatomy through Plastination. I am not religious, but I believe in the democratization of knowledge and by extension, the democratization of anatomy. As a former East German citizen, jailed for two years as a political prisoner, I know what it means to talk about democracy. To my mind democracy is at its best, when the people turn the predictions of experts into a mockery. The unforeseen reunification of Germany, and the success of BodyWorlds exhibitions, both predicted by experts to fail, this is democracy at its best. Authorities like the city government of Munich tried to prohibit the showing of plastinates to the public. But the people voted with their feet. Body Worlds has been seen by over 33 million visitors worldwide which means that at least 100 Million have discussed and understood that the body is not a trash bin but a treasure, changing the understanding of the human body by the public. This is the wish of the people realized, their thirst for sensation, curiosity and knowledge met, proving that Plastination is beauty beneath the skin, frozen in time, between death and decay.

I am thankful to see you all here today and I greet all my old friends who journeyed with me from the beginning: Bob Henry from Tennessee, Ron Wade from Baltimore, Constantin Sora from Vienna, of course Carlos Baptista and everybody else who I see here in the auditorium.

Thank You,

Gunther von Hagens.