

BODY WORLDS

Dr. Gunther von Hagens

Inventor of Plastination – Creator of BODY WORLDS

Bringing the anatomy of humans and animals to audiences worldwide: Dr. Gunther von Hagens is not only a physician and anatomist but also a scientist and inventor. He is recognized as a forward-thinking free spirit who made the human body accessible for education and research in unprecedented ways.

Dr. Gunther von Hagens began his medical studies at the University of Jena in 1965. He was arrested while attempting to flee East Germany after distributing leaflets in protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. In 1970, West German authorities secured his freedom. He completed his medical studies at the University of Lubeck in 1973 and a year later he received his license to practice medicine. He then moved to the University of Heidelberg, where he completed his doctorate in the Department of Anaesthesia and Emergency Medicine. In 1975, he began to work at the Institutes of Anatomy and Pathology, which ignited his passion for invention and to teach anatomy in a new way.

It was in 1977 at the University of Heidelberg that he invented plastination, a vacuum technique to permanently preserve anatomical specimens with reactive plastics specially developed for this purpose. He subsequently founded BIODUR® Products to market the respective polymers and equipment to other institutions around the world. In order to bring plastination to a wider audience, he founded the Institute for Plastination in 1993. Soon after, together with his colleague and wife Dr. Angelina Whalley, he created the first anatomical exhibition of real human bodies, titled BODY WORLDS, which has now seen by more than 47 million people worldwide. They later launched ANIMAL INSIDE OUT, the first exhibition dedicated to plastinated animals, in 2010.

His popular success in Plastination has been accompanied by academic accolades. In 1996, he became a visiting professor at the School of Medicine in Dalian. That same year he became Director of the Plastination Centre at the State Medical Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where he was awarded the title of Honorary Professor. Since 2004, he has been a visiting professor at New York University College of Dentistry.

In 2006, he established Gubener Plastinate GmbH, a plastination laboratory in Guben, Germany. It is considered the world's leading plastination research, development and preparation facility. The campus also houses the PLASTINARIUM, which promotes public anatomy by granting access for all visitors to observe the preparation of permanently preserved, anatomical human and animal specimens.

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The international Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) honoured him in 2013 with a lifetime achievement award for outstanding contribution to the public understanding of science.