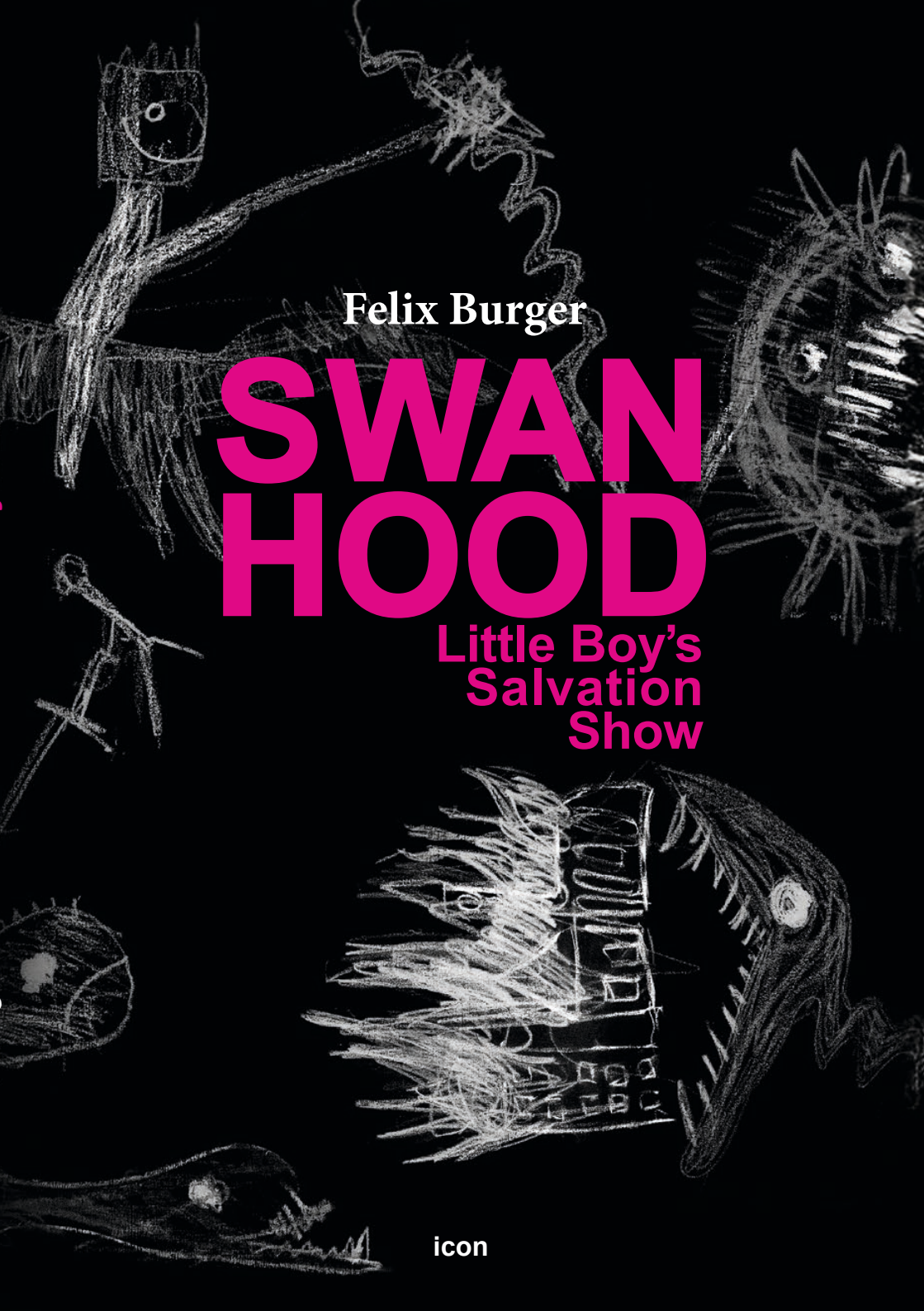




Felix Burger

SWAN HOOD

Little Boy's
Salvation
Show

icon









SWAN HOOD

Little Boy's Salvation Show

Written, Produced, and Directed by

Felix Burger

Co-Direction and Videography

Lion Bischof

Starring

Nicklas Hoffmann as »Swanboy«

Sound Design and Recording

Benedikt David

Ina Nikolow (Headstart Records)

Technical Programming

Kees Reedijk

Set Construction and Organisation

Arthur Boer

Philipp Schmidt

Foley Assistant

Jakob David

Recording »Gralsglockenklavier«

Agnes Ecker

Voices »Beasts of Ancient Mystery«

Korbinian & Olga

Elisabeth Schmitten

Harry Weggli

Mechanical theater with 4K video,
6-channel sound, and talking puppets
34 minutes loop, 2026

All parts of the installation and this
publication are protected by copyright
©Amsterdam/Bayreuth/Munich/Vienna

1976 — 50 JAHRE — 2026
RICHARD WAGNER MUSEUM
BAYREUTH
RWM

In Felix Burgers Installation befinden sich die Besucher:innen in einem mechanischen Theaterstück.

Die Geschichte kreist um einen Jungen, der an der verschlossenen Tür des väterlichen Arbeitszimmers lauscht; Versatzstücke von Parsifal und Lohengrin dringen nach außen, Begriffe wie Reinheit, Weltenachse und Loslösung erreichen das kindliche Trommelfell.

Irritiert und zugleich fasziniert von dieser ihm unbekannten Welt, fasst der Junge den Entschluss, sich in einen Schwan zu verwandeln—den Schwan, von dem ständig gesprochen wird und der im Zentrum jeder Handlung zu stehen scheint. Um seiner Metamorphose einen seriösen Unterbau zu verleihen, beruft er seine Stofftiere als Jury ein, die in vier Aufgaben seine Eignung zum Schwan prüfen und seine Schwanenschaft schließlich besiegeln soll.

Die Aufgaben werden in einem halbstündigen Film auf einer großformatigen Leinwand gezeigt. Im Ausstellungsraum sind der Projektion vier Handpuppen vorgelagert. Über Hubmagnete und Lautsprecher erhalten sie Bewegung und Stimme und sind via digitalem Interface mit der Videoquelle synchronisiert. Die Puppen geben Anweisungen, kommentieren das Geschehen und fällen Urteile.

Ihre Sprache ist in Gedichtform verfasst und orientiert sich im Duktus an traditionellen Märchenerzählungen. Ihre Interventionen verzahnen sich mit dem Film zu einem dialogischen Gefüge, in dem Autorität, Bewertung, Performanz und der Umgang mit dynastischem Erbe zirkulieren. Im Zusammenspiel von Film, Körper und Stimme untersucht die Arbeit die kindliche Aneignung kulturell aufgeladener Mythologie, ohne sie zu psychologisieren oder zu ironisieren. Bedeutungen werden nicht dekonstruiert, sondern verschoben: vom Diskurs in die Praxis, vom Begriff in die Geste. Das Kind agiert dabei nicht als naives Subjekt, sondern als präziser Vollstrecker einer Sprache, deren Ernst es übernimmt, ohne ihren semantischen Unterbau zu teilen.

In seiner formalen Sprache orientiert sich Burger an Gestaltungsmitteln früher Kino- und Opernwelten: gebaute Räume statt digitaler Simulation, sichtbare Mechanik statt virtueller Effekte. Die Tonspur entstand in der Villa Wahnfried am Gralsglockenklavier und basiert ausschließlich auf einer analog erzeugten Klangquelle. Das Instrument wird nicht in seiner vorgesehenen Art—als Repräsentationsmedium der Gralsglocken—, sondern in spielerisch-experimentellen Zugriffen genutzt (z.B. durch Klopfen am Resonanzkörper oder schnelles Wischen über die Saiten). So wird der Wagner'sche Klangraum nicht reproduziert, sondern in eine fragmentierte, prozesshafte Hörstruktur überführt, die dem Prinzip der kindlichen Aneignung folgt.

Das vorliegende Buch enthält die vollständige Transkription aller von den Puppen gesprochenen Texte der Installation.

In Felix Burger's installation, visitors find themselves inside a mechanical theatre piece.

The story centres on a boy listening at the locked door of his father's study. Fragments of Parsifal and Lohengrin seep through the door; ideas such as purity, the axis mundi, and detachment reach the child's ears. Perplexed yet captivated by this unfamiliar world, the boy resolves to transform himself into a swan—the very swan that is constantly invoked and seems to stand at the centre of every event. To lend his metamorphosis a sense of legitimacy, he appoints his stuffed animals as a jury. Through four trials, they are tasked with testing his suitability for swanhood and, ultimately, ratifying his transformation.

The trials unfold in a thirty-minute film projected onto a large-scale screen. Positioned in front of the projection are four hand puppets. Animated by electromagnets and loudspeakers, they are given movement and voice and are synchronised with the film through a digital interface. The puppets issue instructions, comment on the action, and deliver judgments. Their language is entirely in verse and adopts the cadence of traditional fairy tales. Their interventions interweave with the film to create a dialogical structure in which authority, evaluation, performance, and the handling of dynastic heritage continually circulate.

Through the interplay of film, body, and voice, the work examines a child's appropriation of culturally charged mythology without either psychologising or ironising it.

Meaning is not deconstructed but displaced: from discourse into practice, from concept into gesture. The child does not appear as a naïve subject but as the precise executor of a language whose seriousness it embraces without sharing its semantic foundations.

In its formal language, Burger's work draws upon the aesthetics of early cinema and opera: constructed environments rather than digital simulations, visible mechanics rather than virtual effects. The soundtrack was recorded at Villa Wahnfried using the Gralsglockenklavier and is based exclusively on an analog sound source. The instrument is not used in its intended manner—as a representational medium of the Gralsglocken—but instead through playful-experimental forms of interaction (e.g., tapping on the resonating body or rapidly brushing across the strings). In doing so, the Wagnerian sound space is not reproduced, but translated into a fragmented, process-based auditory structure that follows the logic of childlike appropriation.

This book contains the complete transcription of all texts spoken by the puppets in the installation.



Grumpy Dog



Installation view {Beasts of Ancient Mystery and film}



Installation view {Beasts of Ancient Mystery}



Ice Dragon



Schizophrenic Chameleon



Installation view {Beasts of Ancient Mystery and film}

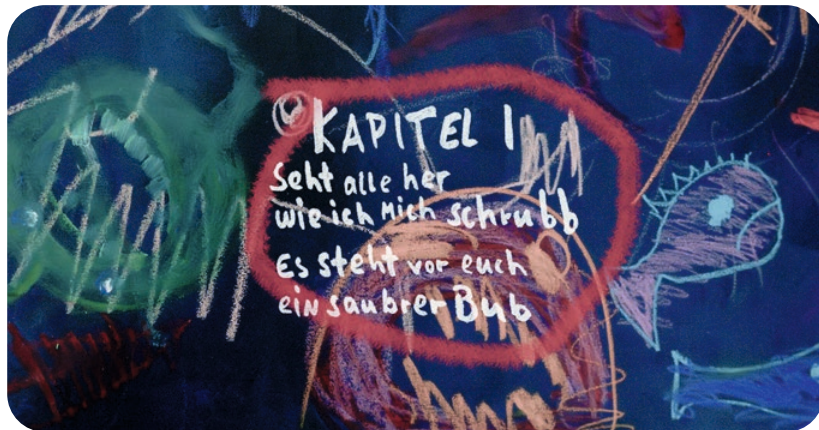


Film still {Opening title}

PROLOGUE

(Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Grumpy Dog, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

Once there lived a little boy
Who'd grown quite bored of games and joy
From father's room came sounds so fine
The singers' voices quite divine
He made a plan, both smart and bright
»I'll play the swan in noble light«
But swanhood is no easy thing
It asks for more than just a wing
A crew was formed with stitched-on grins
With button eyes and cotton skins
Us judges – once just toys you see
Now beasts of ancient mystery
Four trials must be passed with grace
Then little boy joins swanlike race



Film still Chapter I {Title}

CHAPTER I

(Ice Dragon, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

To be a swan, you must be clean
Not just in armpit, toe or spleen
No bubbled bath or foamy scrub
Will fool the room, this holy club
We seek the juice, the sacred brew
The liquids deep inside of you

(4 times in a row: Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Grumpy Dog, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

You wash your body and your face
Yet inner pureness hides its place

—



Film still Chapter I {Inflating the decontamination room}



Film still Chapter I {Swanboy}



Film still Chapter I {Washing the body}



Film still Chapter I {Inner pureness hides its place}



Film still Chapter II {Title}

CHAPTER II

(Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

To be a swan, you must endure
All fights and trials, shy and pure
No rage or anger should you show
Though foes may strike their fiercest blow
No clash of claws, no battle's roar
You're silence on the tempest's shore

(Schizophrenic Chameleon after the Fanfare)

A gloomy knight, so grim and sly
Invites you to where the shadows lie
He wants to shove you to the ground
And give your body one more round

(Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Grumpy Dog, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

The lances itch for their pointed play
Our tournament starts: Hipp Hipp Horray

(Sea Worm, Grumpy Dog, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

You hold yourself firm on the horse

(Ice Dragon)

If you don't fall, you'll feel remorse

(Ice Dragon, Grumpy Dog, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

You hold yourself firm on the mare

(Sea Worm)

Strength should not be your highest care

(Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Grumpy Dog, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

You hold yourself firm on the steed

(Schizophrenic Chameleon)

That's not the right way to succeed

—



Film still Chapter II {The tournament starts}



Film still Chapter II {Gray horse}



Film still Chapter II {The lances itch}



Film still Chapter II {Not the right way to succeed}



Film still Chapter II {Gloomy knight}



Film still Chapter III {Title}

CHAPTER III

(Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

To be a swan you must revolve
Straight lines disturb what you resolve
Your turning keeps the balance right
So humankind won't lose its light
Your circling brings a gentle peace
To all who come and go and cease

(Sea Worm)

Now you must prove, now you must show
So hang on tight, spin fast, spin slow
So spin around in dazzling art
And make all people smile from heart

(All Creatures sing »Risseldy Rosseldy« #1)

La La La La La La La La

La La La La La La La La La La La La

La La La La La La Laa Laa Laa

(Sea Worm)

Now you must prove, now you must show

So hang on tight, spin fast, spin slow

You are the axle, pure, divine

Linking the earth to sky's bright line

(All Creatures sing »Risseldy Rosseldy« #2)

La La La La La La La La

La La La La La La La La La La La La

La La La La La La Laa Laa Laa

(Ice Dragon)

Now you must prove, now you must show

So hang on tight, spin fast, spin slow

(Ice Dragon, Sea Worm)

A storm rolls in, so wild, so tall

Yet you stand firm, you never fall

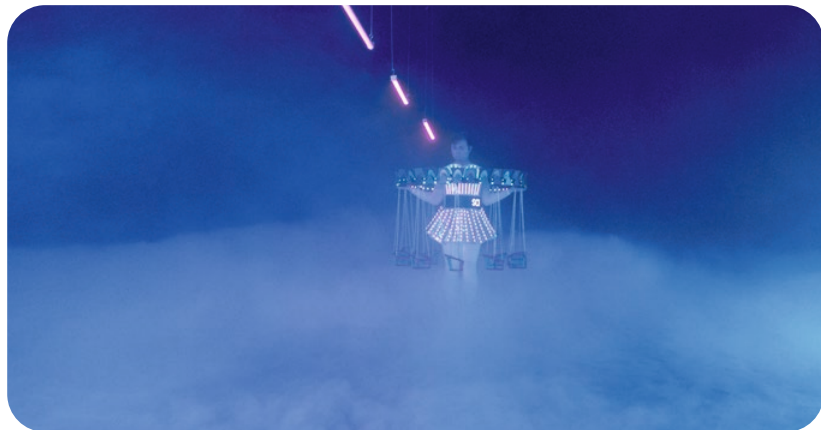
(All Creatures sing »Risseldy Rosseldy« #3)

La La La La La La La La

La La La La La La La La La La La La

La La La La La La Laa Laa Laa

—



Film still Chapter III {The turning keeps the balance right}



Film still Chapter III {Smile from heart}



Film still Chapter III {Celestial bridge}



Film still Chapter III {Storm}



Film still Chapter III {Intense storm}



Film still Chapter III {Spin around in dazzling art}

CHAPTER IV

(Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

To be a swan you must unbind

The veins that hold the common mind

Forget the house from which you came

Family ties are chains of shame

No force shall steer your lonely art

You float apart, a sealed-off heart

(3 x in a row: Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

Your father shines, the brightest star

His aura lights both near and far

He seeks to keep his legacy

And walk with fame and dignity

We feel the suspense, the tension runs high

How do you react, what's your reply



Film still Chapter IV {Title}

(3 x increase: Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Grumpy Dog, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

We feel the suspense, the tension runs high

How do you react, what's your reply

(1 x almost shouting: Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Grumpy Dog, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

We feel the suspense, the tension runs high

How do you react, whaaat's your reeeplyyy

(1 x shouting: Ice Dragon, Sea Worm, Grumpy Dog, Schizophrenic Chameleon)

We feel the suspense, the tension runs high

How do you react, whaaaaat's your reeeeplyyyyy

—



Film still Chapter IV {The house from which you came}



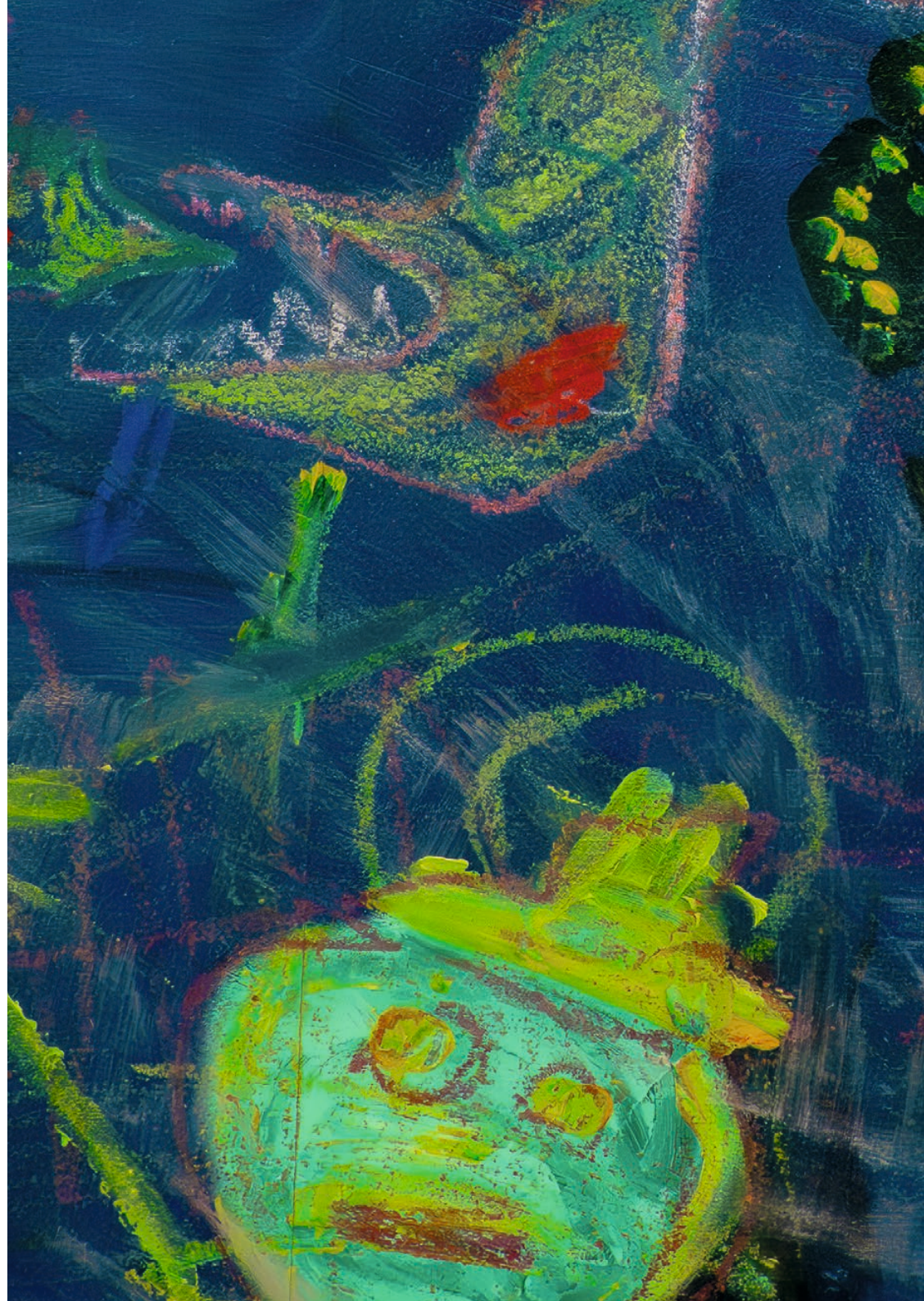
Film still Chapter IV {Chains of shame}

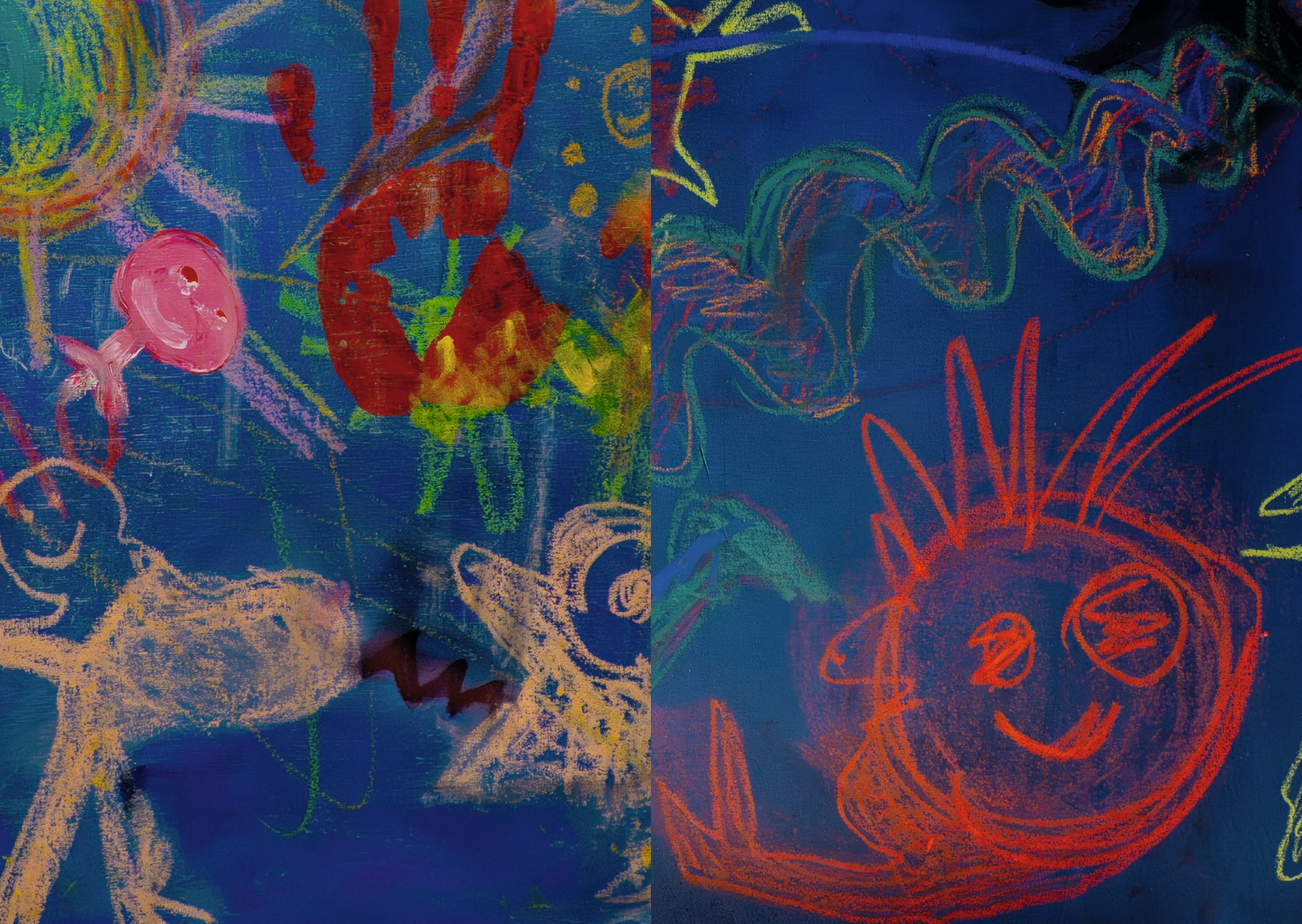


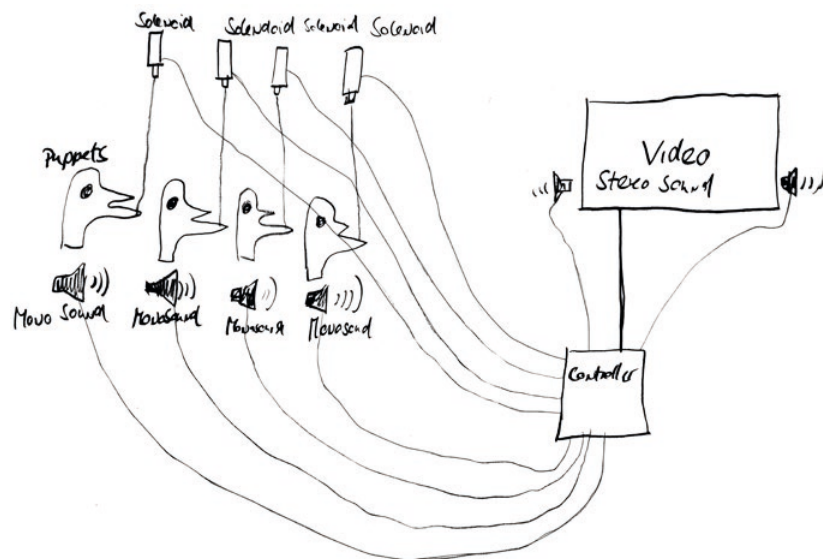
Film still Chapter IV {That's your reply}



Film still Chapter IV {Finale}







This publication is being released in conjunction with the exhibition »50/150 Utopie und Echo« at the Richard Wagner Museum in Bayreuth, July 23 through October 4, 2026, as part of the 150th anniversary of the Bayreuth Opera Festival and the 50th anniversary of the museum.

Graphics and Typesetting: FB
© 2026

ISBN 978-3-68919-097-2

Richard Wagner Museum
Wahnfriedstraße 2
95444 Bayreuth
www.wagnermuseum.de

Hubert Kretschmer
icon Verlag
Türkenstraße 60 UG
80799 München
www.hubert-kretschmer.de