Dr. Gunther von Hagens, Inventor of Plastination & Creator of BODY WORLDS, Has Passed Away

Monday 27 July, 2026

Heidelberg/Germany — It is with deep sadness that the family and the Institute for Plastination announce the passing of Dr. Gunther von Hagens, inventor of Plastination and creator of the BODY WORLDS exhibitions. He died on July 24, 2026, at the age of 81.

Gunther von Hagens fundamentally transformed the field of anatomy. Through Plastination—the preservation technique he invented in 1977—he created an entirely new perspective of the human body for medical education, science and the general public. He made the complexity, vulnerability and beauty of the human body—previously reserved for the dissection room and anatomical textbooks –directly accessible to the wider public.

Together with his wife and curator, Dr. Angelina Whalley, Gunther von Hagens created BODY WORLDS, one of the most successful exhibitions in the world. Since its debut, the exhibition has been visited by more than 58 million people. BODY WORLDS made anatomy publicly accessible, encouraged reflection on health, disease, lifestyle and mortality, and inspired millions of people understand and appreciate their own bodies.

“Gunther wanted to give people the opportunity to look beneath the skin — not out of sensationalism, but from the deep conviction that knowledge of one’s own body can contribute to a more conscious, healthier responsible life,” says Angelina Whalley. “His work was scientific, educational and deeply humanistic. He enabled millions of people to see their own bodies in a new light.”

His son, Rurik von Hagens, also honors his father’s life’s work, “My father never accepted that boundaries were fixed. He brought anatomy out of the closed world of specialists and into society. His courage, his perseverance and his unwavering belief that education serves humanity will continue to guide us.”

Gunther von Hagens was a pioneer, researcher, inventor and creator. His life’s work united scientific precision with exceptional craftsmanship, artistic expression and a strong commitment to education. He was an unconventional and often provocative thinker who sparked heated debates, overcame resistance and understood anatomy as an encounter with life itself.

Body donation was always a central part of his work. The human specimens displayed in the BODY WORLDS come from individuals who, during their lifetime, decided to donate their bodies after death for Plastination, scientific research and anatomical education. Gunther von Hagens was deeply grateful to these individuals. He regarded their decision as an extraordinary contribution to education, science and public enlightenment.

It was Gunther von Hagens’ own wish that his body, too, be made available for Plastination after his death. His family will respect and carry out this wish.

Despite serious illness, Gunther von Hagens remained closely connected to his life’s work. The Plastination technique he developed, the Institute for Plastination, the PLASTINARIUM and the BODY WORLDS exhibitions will carry his legacy forward. His scientific and craftsmanship-based legacy lives on in a particularly visible way in Guben. There, at the PLASTINARIUM, anatomical specimens are created for use in the education of physicians and other healthcare professionals at universities, medical schools and educational institutions around the world.

Today, Plastination itself is used at numerous universities, medical schools and educational institutions worldwide.

In this way, the mission Gunther von Hagens began nearly five decades ago continues far beyond BODY WORLDS:

to preserve anatomy permanently, to make it visible, and to make it accessible for science, teaching and public education.

The family kindly asks that their privacy be respected during this time of mourning.

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About Dr. Gunther von Hagens

Dr. Gunther von Hagens was born on January 10, 1945, in Alt-Skalden, in what is now Poland, and grew up in the GDR. After studying medicine, he invented Plastination at the University of Heidelberg in 1977—a technique for the permanent preservation of biological specimens. In 1993, he founded the Institute for Plastination in Heidelberg, followed in 2006 by the PLASTINARIUM in Guben, which has for many years served as the central laboratory facility for Plastination. With the BODY WORLDS exhibitions, he made human anatomy accessible to audiences around the world. His work transformed anatomical education and became one of the most recognized intersections of science, medicine and public exhibition in the world.

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