



PHH foto

A living fairy tale in the land of fantasy Imaginarium

With a kindergarten exploring the land of fantasy

One dark, rainy and chilly November morning a group of preschool kids ages 4-6 arrive with their teacher to Silkeborg Bad, where they are invited to spend an hour in a warm magical world of fantastic characters, puppets and animals, lush colors and magical music. As soon as they take off their overalls, boots, hats and gloves they are transported with open eyes and mouths into a new and enchanting dream world.

They are welcomed with friendly words by the museum guide: *'At museums you may rarely touch anything, but here you may play, touch and use everything...just as long as you are careful.'* Sweetly and at their level, she guides them through the many tableaux, before letting them have free play time. The children certainly do have a good time. In the 'stable' with several large horses the first little girl sticks her head up in the neck of a big horse head: *'I can see out of the horse's eyes'*, she cries excitedly. In the 'attic room' a boy sees a funny grandpa puppet and yells spontaneously *'He looks goofy!'*

In the big enchanting room the children discover a 'path to mythology' with many fantasy animals, from big, soft 'velour fish' with big snouts to wild cats, elk, rhinos, wild boars, satyr and unicorn – all in festive, bright colors. A couple of girls throw huge dice and hop around playing 'the earth is burning', to an area with the same color as the top side of the dice, while others 'swim' with the current of the stream on belly skateboards along the shore in the world of fantasy. They glide under a little bridge in the 'blue lagoon': *'Wow! Did you see this?'* a boy points at a wall decorated with hungry whales with sharp teeth.

Boys and girls are excited about the classic carnival shooting gallery. The carnival tent here is changed into a colorful castle from the Middle Ages with fearsome dragons, princesses

and knights. Pretty soon the children become heroic knights or Saint George, arm their bows with big balls and shoot the bad guys. Boys and girls are equally good at saving the princess.

What is an imaginary world without beautiful horses? Naturally horses belong here, and they are good tempered and sweet as soon as a couple of girls, after putting on riding helmets, enter the arena. Soon I am sure they are riding into the moving arena, into dreamland to meet their prince.

In the middle of Imaginarium is an enticing carrousel for children. Three girls are in place and soon two small gentlemen are giving them a good spin for a smooth ride. Who says 'he, she, or gender neutral'? Who is the passenger here and who is pushing? Gender differences anyone?

A huge draw is also the many secretive old fashioned picture boxes from another era, initially a bit of a mystery to the children who don't know what they are. A few seconds later there are lights in the boxes and the cranks are spinning, and through the little peek-hole in each box the children watch small animated scenes of life in the country and of circus performances. Quite a contrast to their lives with digital iPad picture boxes.

The awesome 'Hunting lounge' presents strange, weird creatures and animals, wonderful, especially for the adults who see the humor in the 'portrait gallery's' subtle texts, for example: *'Werewolf captured near Lysbro in 1795'* or *'Skeleton of unidentified animal discovered in 1925'*.

On the way to the 'workshop' the gruesome 'Wolf's Story' makes an indelible impression on all of the children and before long the kids begin to tell us the scary story Red Riding Hood. Very cute!

The workshop with all of its mechanics is also perfect. The children are very curious as to how everything works: Several of them wind the fascinating all-wood renaissance clock while the tired pendulum needs a little push to get started. 'The windmill' wings get their wind and the little steam locomotive and train take a turn on the roller coaster. The small marionettes take a Sunday afternoon walk around the floor and dolls have a romantic boat ride in a rocking reed basket.

Completely occupied by the many and varied games and discoveries, the hour has gone so quickly. It has been a rare magical experience for the children, their teachers and yours truly as a 'fly on the wall'.

With classic craftsmanship, arts, woodworking, loads of imagination and creativity Matej Forman and his many Czech artist collaborators have created a wonderful world of fantasy which invites and inspires children to play and discover; a genre and a piece of cultural history which feels forgotten and gone. I wish and hope that this will inspire parents, teachers and all other childish souls to play and discover.

A huge thank you to Matej Forman, Kunstcentret Silkeborg Bad and Ulla Dingsøe from Festival of Wonder, because Silkeborg had this opportunity to experience a land of fantasy *Imaginarium*. Even I, along with the lovely children, was in a *living* fairy tale in a fantasy land!

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