



The "First Sack", prepared as an exhibit by the artist Prof. Armin Sandig.

## What chance can do:

## *The story of Flour World*

by Anne Müller

**I**t was pure chance that washed the eccentric idea up at his feet. While taking a walk on the beach in Dubai in 1998, Volkmar Wywiol stumbled over a piece of plastic sheeting with writing in Arabic. The find turned out to be a flour sack from one of his customers. "I saw that as a good omen in keeping with our company motto, 'Mühlenchemie makes good flours even better.'" The "stranded flour sack" became the foundation stone of a collection. Transformed into a work of art, the plastic bag now hangs in the entrance hall of Wywiol's Flour Museum. "It certainly is a crazy idea", he admits. The businessman, who is still a managing partner of the Stern-Wywiol Gruppe at the age of 80, developed his collection into a Gallery of Flour Sacks with motifs and symbols from every corner of the earth that testify to the strength inherent in wheat.

"Flour sacks?" his curator asked doubtfully, wondering what she was expected to do with such trivial objects. But the cultural scientist Angela Jannelli allowed herself to be persuaded and conjured up a concept that now comprises 3,000 flour sacks from every continent, spiced with myths and information on agriculture and grain as part of the cultural history of man.

Demeter, the goddess of grain and fertility, presides over the Sackothèque, the museum's archive. The artist Kathinka Willinek from Berlin, with nylon thread and 10,483 knots, created her as a wall decoration. A flour sack flown into the city during the Berlin Airlift tells the story of this remarkable relief effort. The darkened Myth Room is steeped in mysterious, deep blue. Ten little flaps set into the walls open to cast light on stories from the realm of milling – from the ancient statuette of an Egyptian servant girl grinding corn, through the Mexican altar for the dead with the "Pan de Muertos" to the story of the "Old Wives' Mill".

Volkmar Wywiol demonstrates that old flour sacks can be transformed into "haute couture". The "sackcloth" dresses were worn by models at the opening of the museum in 2008.



The motifs and symbols on the sacks reveal the global significance of wheat.

Flour myths brought to light: a showcase shows the link between flour and the Moulin Rouge in Paris.



All photos courtesy of @Müller/Nikschaf

One box contains a film sequence with Charlie Chaplin's "Dance of the Rolls". A view of the Moulin Rouge in the entertainment district of Paris is a reminder that mills were often associated with brothels.

The museum also illustrates the leading role played in the international milling industry by Mühlenchemie, a member of the Stern-Wywiol Gruppe, as a manufacturer of flour improvers such as vitamins and enzymes. The eleven specialist firms under the umbrella of the Stern-Wywiol holding company produce a wide range of functional systems for food. The producing company SternMaid was established in Wittenburg in 1996 and now employs 200 staff. It was in Wittenburg, too, that Volkmar Wywiol found the ideal place for his Flour World Museum: a former District Court building that was altered inside and restored according to the regulations for listed buildings. Wywiol already has new plans in mind for this, too. The first floor is to be reconstructed for an enlargement of the exhibition.

"Every mill should be represented at our museum through a

flour sack with an interesting motif," says Volkmar Wywiol, and invites mill owners the world over to contribute to the unique "Gallery of Flour Sacks".



The museum in the former court building in Wittenburg