

Press Release

Shakespeare goes digital: the new 'Shakespeare Illustration Archive Oppel – Hammerschmidt'

The previously unpublished University of Mainz collection of the work of artists on the plays of William Shakespeare is now available on the Internet at no charge.

(Mainz, November 7, 2008) Based on examples from what is probably William Shakespeare's most famous work, *Hamlet*, created around 1601-02, roughly 3,500 previously unpublished digital illustrations will be presented to the public for the first time on November 17, 2008, during a festive ceremony at the Central Library of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, including a multiply linked-up Internet version.

Immediately after the re-opening of the University of Mainz in 1946, the nationally and internationally renowned Shakespeare and Goethe researcher, Professor Horst Oppel, began to collect works of artists on Shakespeare's dramas - despite the difficult conditions following World War II. In doing so, he laid the foundation for the only Shakespeare illustration archive in the world. In the 1980s and 1990s, Mainz Shakespeare researcher, Professor Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel, was able to use her position as the leading research team member of the German Research Foundation and academy project "The Shakespeare Illustration" to expand Oppel's

collection from around 1,600 to c. 7,000 illustrations. The fascinating artistic works on Shakespeare's plays from the 1590s to the present go back to the lifetime of the poet himself, providing the viewer with a unique look into the changing artistic styles and interpretive approaches. Among the roughly 800 artists are such names as Inigo Jones, Frans Hals, Hogarth, Chodowiecki, Fuseli (Füßli), Reynolds, Blake, Turner, Kaulbach, Delacroix, Rossetti, Millais, Victor Müller, Kubin, Lehmbruck, Dali, Chagall and Teo Otto. On behalf of the Mainz Academy of Sciences and Literature, Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel published a three-volume work in 2003 entitled *Shakespearian Illustrations from 1594 to 2000: The Work of Artists on Shakespeare's Plays - Catalogue, History, Function and Interpretation*, including roughly 3,100 illustrations, a dictionary of artists, a classified bibliography and indexes of artists, engravers, Shakespearian characters, and actors.

In 2005, the archive was donated to the Central Library of the University of Mainz on the condition that the unpublished parts of the Shakespeare Illustration Archive be digitalized and made available to the public. In accordance with the Agreement of Donation, the collection was given the name 'Shakespeare Illustration Archive Oppel-Hammerschmidt'. The project made very good progress under the auspices of Library Director Dr. Andreas Anderhub. An essential contributor to the interdisciplinary and campus-wide effort was graduate librarian Heike Geisel, who carried out the time-consuming process of digitalizing and indexing the materials and established the numerous links to the site, among them the link to the database of the university's Institute of Art History. During the project, she received invaluable support from Dr. Annette Holzapfel-Pschorn from the Central IT Department at the university, who set up an impressive Web interface using the latest application technologies. It is to be expected that this new, campus-wide freely available arts and cultural studies research tool at the University of Mainz will not only meet with great interest among researchers and specialists, but also among the creators of the arts and culture in general as well as directors, literary managers, teachers and innumerable Shakespeare enthusiasts.

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