

## TRADITION IN MURAU

# The big meeting of the large Samson figures



Last big Samson gathering in Lungau (Bild: Roland Holitzky)

**The custom of Samson carrying has been on the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage since 2010. This tradition exists in just twelve communities in the Styrian district of Murau and in Lungau in Salzburg. On August 31, for the first time since 1949, all the Samson figures meet again in Murau.**

It is a big visit that has announced itself in Murau on August 31. Big not only because the Samson figures that meet there are on average around six meters high. But also big, because such gatherings are rare. "The last time Murau hosted a meeting of all Lungau and Styrian Samson figures was in 1949," says Martin Lienhart from the Murau Citizens' Guard, which is responsible for the event.

### Custom originated in the time of the Counter-Reformation

Accordingly, there is great anticipation for the feast day, which celebrates a tradition that dates back to the time of the Counter-Reformation: after the majority of people had turned to the Lutheran doctrine in the 16th century, the Habsburgs pushed ahead with re-Catholicization with great severity. "New methods were needed to rekindle enthusiasm for the Catholic Church. For example, large processions were organized on public holidays and biblical scenes were re-enacted in public," says Lienhart.





A long tradition: (Bild: Murauer Bürgergarde)

Samson is the only figure to have survived over the centuries. He makes his rounds on fixed dates, in some places accompanied by two dwarves. The highlight is the Samson dance, for which each Samson has a specific piece of music. "The tradition still plays an important role in village cohesion and people's identification with their homeland," says Lienhart.

#### **Giants from Belgium and Catalonia are also guests**

And so it is also a big event when all the Austrian Samson figures come together in Murau on August 31. And even giants from Charleroi in Belgium and the so-called "Geganters i Grallers" from La Llacuna in Catalonia, Spain, will be attending the festival.



The "Geganters i Grallers" from Catalonia embody useful professions - in this case the fire department (Bild: Murauer Bürgergarde)

The festival starts at 1 pm on Saturday with the parade of the Samson figures on Murau's main square. The ceremony begins at 1.30 p.m. with a liturgy of the word held by Bishop Wilhelm Krautwaschl. From 3 pm, the giants will parade through the town - accompanied by the Murau town band, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. And as a grand finale, there is a concert by the Edlseer from 8 pm.

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