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Switzerland at Expo '92 in Seville

La Grande Fiesta

This is the first time that Switzerland has taken the imposing subject of "Culture" for its contribution to a world exhibition; but it is approaching the issue from a most unexpectedly fresh and light-hearted way, which many people will certainly find quite un-Swiss.

It was a difficult birth and, hopefully, all will end well. The prehistory of the Swiss pavilion, which should now be ready on time for April 20, has been long and not without pain. The main problem was the design of the tower. This became a matter of fierce controversy, and much time was lost in argument. An initial project featured an ice tower protected by an awning which slowly turned to face the sun. But this would have consumed too much energy and had to be abandoned. The second proposal – from the same architect – was equally devoted to the idea of the transitory nature of things but this time in the form of a papier maché tower. The project was approved, but after differences of opinion

about exactly how the filigree construction was to be made, the architect withdrew from his contract, and it was back to square one. Finally it was the Basle Trade Fair which took over complete responsibility for the realisation and operation of the Swiss pavilion.

The "Pabellón de Suiza"

At this stage there were two main objectives which had to be attained. The first was to re-

thirty metre high papier-maché tower standing alone, as in the previous design. The final effect will be not of a purpose-built edifice but, yes, a transitory structure made up chiefly of filigree design which will use the play of light, shadow and the wind to charm the visitor as he approaches and enters the pavilion across the sloping ramp.

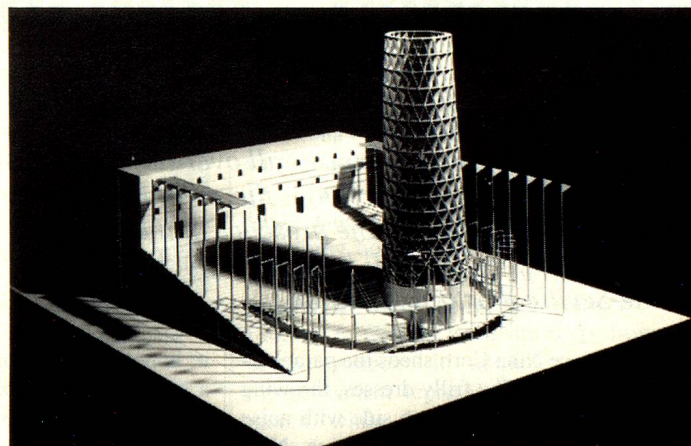
Culture not clichés

It is difficult enough to find an adequate definition of Swiss culture, let alone to "exhibit" it. In contrast to French or German culture, each of which is much easier to conceive as an integrated whole, Switzerland's cultural scenery is so marked by regional differences that it is difficult to extract any real unifying feature. But this cultural partitioning has never prevented Swiss artists from being open to the world and even from working abroad. On the contrary this steady approach to the wider world has often been seen as an ab-

Seville and Andalusia

Al Andalus is the Arabic name for Spain, and this southernmost region of the country was under Moorish domination longer than any other. Today, for foreigners at any rate, it conjures up the idea of Spain at its most classical: bullfights and flamenco, guitars and castanets, proud Spanish women in mantillas with flowers in their hair. It was Andalusia's capital city of Seville which provided the inspiration for Christopher Columbus' expeditions to the Americas, and it was through this capital city that poured the unending streams of gold and silver and other treasures from the New World back into Europe. Amongst other impressive witnesses to this former splendour is the Giralda, the slim minaret of a former mosque, today the bell-tower of the huge Gothic cathedral, the third biggest church in Europe after St. Peter's in Rome and St. Paul's in London. But it is above all in the romantic streets of the old city that we feel the sensuous charm of the south, and in the former Jewish quarter of Santa Cruz with its souk-like maze of alleys, courtyards and little squares – where one can while away the long summer days amongst happy people, by cool fountains and regaled with the heavenly scent of jasmine.

Model of the Swiss pavilion at Expo 92 in Seville (Photo: Keystone).



vive the idea of festival architecture which had been pushed into the background in the earlier designs; but this was indeed to be achieved through the idea of the transitory nature of things which had been there from the beginning. The second was to make the pavilion serve as a medium through which Swiss culture could be presented to the world. In the event it was decided that a large part of the available surface would be taken up by a huge spectator ramp sloping upwards (see illustration) at the top of which would be the actual pavilion with its main stage for cultural events, and other smaller areas within for exhibitions and film shows. There would also be an information centre and of course a restaurant and bar. The pavilion itself would be a slender three-storey building with additional upstairs areas for other exhibitions and smaller events. Visitors would be able to look out through its gateways across the ramp to an open-air auditorium. Beyond this would be a

solutely necessary breaking away from artistic bounds judged to be too narrow. Those responsible for the Swiss pavilion have tried to get right away for once from the image of their country which is ever and again presented to the world: cheese, cows, the white cross on the red background, yodellers, watches and chocolate. It was the Federal Council itself in its original message to Paliament about the Swiss pavilion that inspired this attempt to show our culture to the world in terms of folly and phantasy.

Tradition and avant-garde

So what does this attempt to innovate mean in practice? For example, the public suddenly finds itself faced with a totally unexpected, apparently totally un-Swiss, dragon gate – which forms the entrance to the tower. A music in speech, made up of the mysterious sounds of Switzerland's multifarious dialects, rings upon the ear. The newsstand and infor-



"The Age of Discovery"

In 1992 the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America is being celebrated. This is important enough to us all, although it is not now seen everywhere as favourably as in the past. But for better or for worse the main theme of Expo 92 is to be "The Age of Discovery". It should be taken to mean a voyage through time and space, a looking backward and a looking forward, a representation of how the world of the fifteenth century has turned into the world we see today.

mation desk are together graced with the name of "kitschosko", a play on the German word for all that is transitory in art: here at

least you can buy the traditions of Switzerland, the army knife, the cow bell and the flower of the Alpine edelweiss. The "gradin", which is the plaza of the pavilion, is made up of the huge sloping ramp described above, and it features sculptures made from old iron and scrap, and alongside them under the parasols of the south street performers and buskers go through their acts. Switzerland is of course shown from a slightly more serious angle, but not too much so, elsewhere in the pavilion, and we may take as one example the exhibition devoted to "Unlikely Men and Women of Switzerland".

Special events

There will be special events in special weeks under the general heading of "Switzerland meets Spain". Swiss composers will find their

works performed by Spanish musicians, and in return Swiss ensembles will take up the challenge of contemporary Spanish music. In the same way there will be a modest festival of jazz, in which young artists from both countries will be able to exchange views on both the music and the life of today. In Spain as in Switzerland there are close relationships between folk music – though not in the commercial form so often associated with it – and contemporary jazz composition. A magic cooking week is also planned (are we well enough aware that both Swiss and Spanish magicians of this ilk are amongst the world's most renowned?), and the last declining days of the exhibition will be reserved for a rock festival to bring all our young people together.

Heidi Willumat

The rise of Nina Corti

Flamenco – now in jeans

Flamenco tradition – old and new. She started out ten years ago in small theatres. Today this superb Swiss dancer and her musical ensemble fill concert halls and opera houses all over the world. Last year she worked with José Carreras to arrange the opening festivities for the Olympic year, which were held in the presence of the King and Queen of Spain. In April of this year she will be a guest for two weeks at the Swiss pavilion at the Seville World Exhibition.

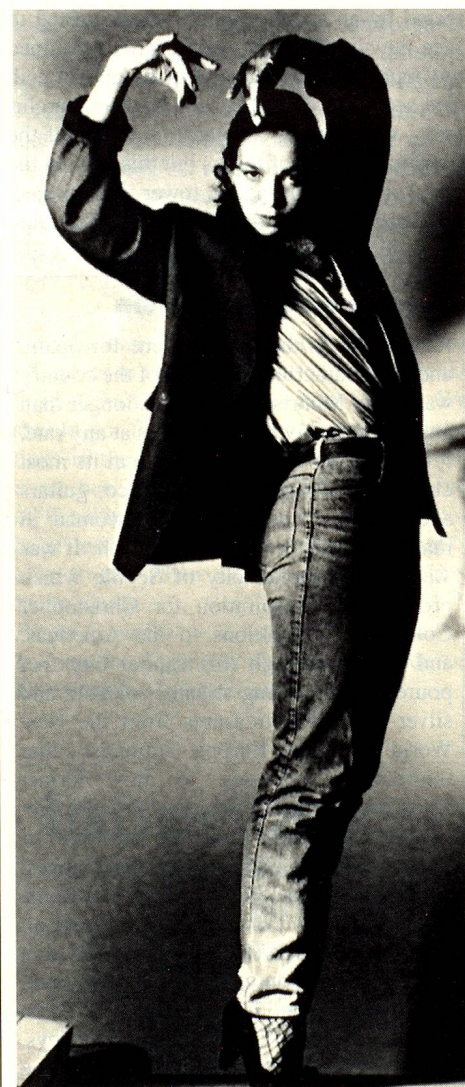
Piece by piece Nina Corti sheds the paraphernalia of the past. The frilly dresses, throwing their great folds from side to side with noise and gusto, fall victim to pure dance. Nina Corti peels off one skin after another. Once the classical music – which appears as a solid block in the programme – is over, she seems like a being freed from all convention. There is nothing now to inhibit her freedom of movement, no composition intervenes to affect her own power to improvise.

And as we well know Nina Corti does not shrink from tradition – she seems as Spanish in her dancing as we feel we have the right to expect; her "Solea por buleria" is a perfect example. But never for a moment does she lose her talent for modern dance in the mist of tradition. Throwing aside the traditional costumes, the "bata de cola", the rustling frills, this Swiss dancer – proud to boast of her Italian, Spanish, Polish and Jewish forebears – dances in trousers. In her faded jeans and her blue silk blouse with a simple bright red scarf casually thrown around her, this beautiful woman is now as contemporary up-to-date as any one of us. She is the living proof that flamenco, expressed as Nina Corti interprets

it, is not a phenomenon fixed in the past but a style of dancing which is still in constant development and has by no means exhausted its creative potential.

She provides evidence enough for this assertion. Just as in past centuries flamenco soaked up the most varied influences from its surroundings without losing any of its unique character, it is still – in her view – capable of travelling along the same road today and far into the future. Nina Corti dances flamenco with body and soul. She accepts its rules, she respects its forms; with the movements of her arms which seem like the beating of wings she kindles all the fires of the flamenco while at the same time performing the "zapateado" – the famous stamp – with such vivacity that she strikes sparks from the ground. She not only performs the flamenco, she creates it anew – sometimes dancing it to classical music and sometimes to jazz. She shakes the dust off the traditional melodies and transforms them in a truly distinctive way into a genuine expression of our own times – so that even a younger generation largely bred on pop music finds it irresistible.

Hartmut Regitz, ballet critic



Tradition and everyday life combine. For Nina Corti flamenco is everything – except frozen into folklore. (Photo: Hardy Brackmann)