

Swiss national museum

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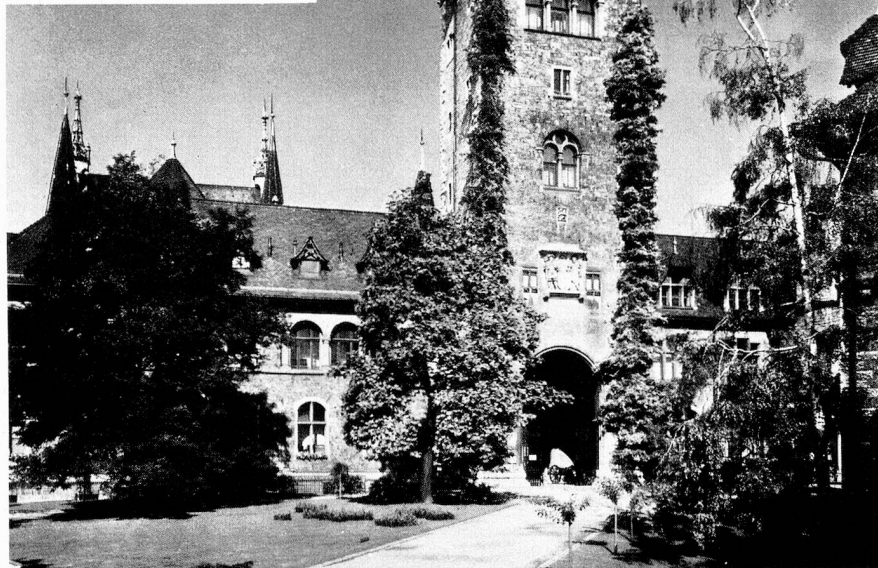
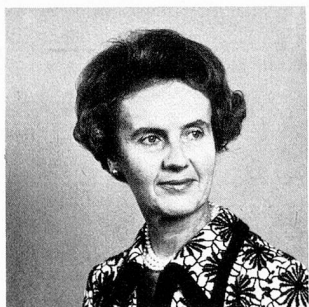
Features

Swiss National Museum

Jenny Schneider, the daughter of a Basle art historian, was born at the Hague (Netherlands) where she grew up. She returned to Switzerland in the second World War and spent the last few years of her schooling at the «Gymnasium». She graduated the doctorate with a thesis in Swiss glass-painting of the 16th century. In 1956, she became an assistant in the service of the Swiss National Museum in Zurich. Since 1961, she has been in charge of the section on glass-paintings, textiles and costumes. She has been Deputy Director since 1971, at that time the most highly classified woman in Swiss federal service. She is the author of scientific essays and publications, the 1971 catalogue on glass-painting and the 1975 textile catalogue. At the moment she is Chairman of the International Committee for the Museums and Collections of Costume.

Origin – Development – Range

The origin of the Swiss National Museum in Zurich was established in The Federal Decree of 1890, which resolved «to accept significant national antiques of historic and arts and crafts nature and to preserve them in planned and orderly manner.» The castle-like building in an imitated historic style was erected between 1892 and 1898 according to the plans by the architect Gustav Gull. The rambling edifice has created considerable difficulties in using the space for exhibition purposes; and this means constant efforts in trying to adapt the presentation of objects to modern requirements. As a national museum it is under the Federal Department of the Interior. A commission of seven members appointed by the Federal Council watches over the administration carried out by the management. About 150 officials of every field and assistants employed by the hour share the manifold tasks. Fourteen university graduates deal with the departements which comprise to one-third pri-



mitive and early history and to two-thirds the general section from the Middle Ages to the First World War. When the museum was founded, there were already sizable municipal and cantonal collections at the disposal of the authorities. Ever since, the number of objects has grown all the time, and one tries to complete the visualised collection programme and to fill in gaps by purchases, gifts and loans. The ultimate guiding principle remains that only objects are acquired which were constructed in Switzerland or were authentically used in parts of present-day Switzerland. The main building houses numerous collections for study purposes, as well as a few workshops, studios and laboratories, quite apart from the exhibition halls. Cabinet makers, locksmiths, saddler/up-

holsterers are engaged on current work, as for instance preparing an exhibition. Due to great lack of space, further workshops have had to be distributed amongst various houses in town, the chemical-physical laboratory, the studios for the restoration and conservation of sculptures, pictures, painted glass panes and ceramics, as well as the workshops for the conservation of textiles, costumes, flags and uniforms. Needless to say, that inspite of the Museum's own driving service, administrative difficulties are inevitable, and centralisation would bring about enormous savings. The same applies to the collections for study purposes. In addition, the following collections have been entrusted to the Museum for looking after: The Guild House «zur Meise» in Zurich, 1st floor: Faience objects

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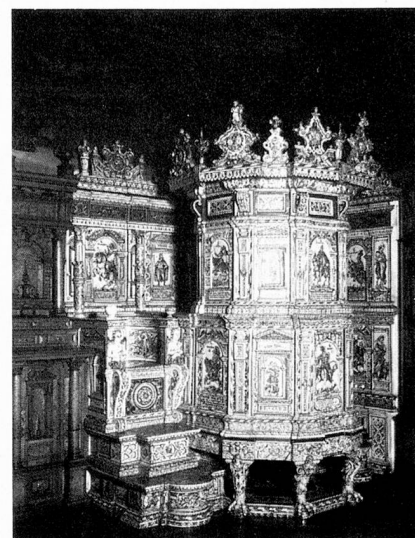
and porcelain belonging to the National Museum; the Zurich Domestic Museum in two buildings from the 17th century at the Baerengasse in Zurich (opening beginning of 1976); Schloss Wildegg (Aargau): domestic dwelling atmosphere from 16th to 19th century; Castle Prangins (Vaud): Art and cultural treasures of Switzerland from 18th and 19th century (in preparation); Caprino (Ticino): Swiss Customs and Smuggling Museum.

The Museum and the Public

The favourable position and adequate publicity contribute to high numbers of visitors. Apart from the permanent collections, the main attraction are various temporary exhibitions in the different sections. A visitors' service arranges regular guided tours and organises individual ones on demand and in several languages. The schools' service is particularly active and tries increasingly to interest young people. Every summer, for instance, a youth camp is organised, when school classes of the

eleven and twelve year age groups from various parts of the country are the guests of the Museum for three days. They are introduced to techniques like wood and metal work, textile printing, spinning, weaving, pottery etc. It is important that these children who are the visitors of tomorrow, come into close contact with cultural values worth preserving. To adults, the Museum serves as information office. A flood of personal and written enquiries arrive daily and are passed on to specialists. Some of the information concerns collection items of the Museum, but by far the largest number of requests are in connection with objects presented for inspection and closer definition. Officials are available as far as age and origin are concerned, but they are not allowed to put any value on articles. In every expert field, extensive libraries are at hand, also photo libraries and collections for the purpose of study, set up according to the latest discoveries. These are at the disposal of genuine experts; previous application is essential.

Lately, at the beginning of every year, a special show has been organised of all objects given or lent to the Museum during the preceding year. To this event, donors and lenders are invited, and this in turn leads to closer personal contacts. The Society of Friends of the Swiss National Museums, too, is amongst the most active promoters of the Museums. Its members are art lovers and historians from all parts of Switzerland who have a particularly close relationship with the Museum. Next to the Swiss Transport Museum in Lucerne, the Swiss National Museum is the biggest museum and largest historical collection in the country. It houses the offices of the Federation of Museums in Switzerland, to which belong approximately 250 museums of all branches, including



Stove from Winterthur,
by Ludwig Pfau, 1620

the smallest local collections on show.

Science and Research

Since the National Museum has a mandate to provide cultural education, science and research are given particular attention. All articles and objects already at the Museum and every newly arriving exhibit have to be entered in a detailed inventory, photographed and catalogued. The appropriate workshops and laboratories are concerned with expert restoration and conservation. Usually, a comprehensive scientific assessment is only possible after all these stages of work. The evaluation is done by way of publications such as catalogues, articles in specialised periodicals, lectures etc. Congresses, symposia and conferences at home and abroad serve further expert education as well as attainment of additional knowledge and results. An important role is played by the various excavation campaigns undertaken by the National Museum. The range covers anything from pre-historic settlement analyses in the Alps and lower Alps to fortress research in the Midlands. To this must be added unexpected tasks such as emer-

Musical clock, around 1820



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gency excavations when discoveries are made during road or field works. A few years ago, the National Museum was asked to send specialists to Tunisia in order to salvage a Phoenician wooden sarcophagus from a tomb at Kerkouan. On the spot they had first to repair the coffin for transport. It was made of cypress wood after the model of caryatids and in the posture of the local Phoenician goddess Tanit.

After extensive conservation processes in the laboratories of the Museum in Zurich, the treasure, now secure against disintegration, was flown back to Tunisia by Swissair.

International Tasks and Connections

Many are the direct or indirect connections of the Museum with other countries. As a member of the International Council of Museums, it is in touch with most of the larger museums in the world. It is important to keep an eye on the international art market, for – if possible and financially acceptable – the Museum endeavours to repatriate Swiss objects that found their way abroad at one time or another. Manyfold are the requests for information, which reach from searching for family crests, made by foreigners of Swiss origin, to the most complicated technical questions. Visits of foreign experts and colleagues are most valuable, for exchange of thought and experience invariably means great gains to both sides. Specialists of the National Museum travel abroad as experts and advisers especially in the field of conservation, equally as teachers and lecturers at specialised meetings and as escorts with exhibition material. The Museum's scientists often belong to international panels of experts. In addition, results of their publicity work appear in technical periodicals. The magazine published by the Museum

A few Indications

Swiss National Museum Zurich

Owner:	The Swiss Confederation
Location:	next to main station and air terminal, Zurich
Inauguration:	1898
Admission:	free
Hours of opening:	daily from 10–12 and 14–17 hours, Monday 14–17 hours From the middle of June to mid-September: 10–17 hours, Monday 12–17 hours. Closed on: New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, «Sechseläuten» Monday, 1st May, Whit Sunday, «Knabenschiesse», Federal Day of Prayer, Christmas Day.

Number of visitors in 1975: 266 069

Number of exhibition rooms: 84

Main sections:

Primitive and early history, excavation, discoveries – arms, flags, military paraphernalia – gold and silver-smiths' work – non-ferrous metal work, pewter – pottery, glass, – textiles, costumes, jewellery – coins, medals – seals – glass painting – sculptures – paintings, graphic art – furniture, interiors – watches and clocks – musical instruments – rural objects, art and craft antiques.

Annual credit for the purchase of antiques:	Fr. 400,000.–
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«Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte» is sent to 200 Swiss Embassies and Consulates all over the world, whilst the Museum's own library assists in active exchange of technical publications. The manifold activities of the

National Museum are also reflected in alternating exhibitions as the recent one on «Switzerland's Good Services». Its various sections deal with mediation, protecting power, international organisations and conferences, humanitarian activities, the field of arbitration and international mandates. Finally, but not least, the «Pro Helvetia» Foundation, too, helps the Museum to build bridges to other countries.

The Swiss National Museum, a carrier of culture in the truest sense of the word, is a federal institution and thus belongs to all Swiss. A visit to one's «own» museum should therefore be included in the programme again and again, specially since exhibits on show are continuously added to and changed. Postcards, slides, brochures, catalogues and, during the summer months a sales counter with copies of objects at the Museum, help to keep awake memories of what one saw and to illustrate it all abroad.

J.S.

Glass-pane of the town of Zurich, 1500

