

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 13 (1986)
Heft: 4

Artikel: The Swiss cultural center in Paris : three cheers for year two!
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907878>

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Three Cheers for Year Two!

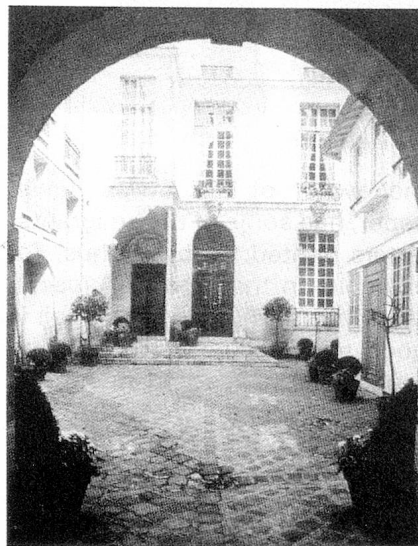
Inaugurated in October 1985, the first Swiss cultural centre to be established abroad, in the Marais quarter of Paris, has weathered its first year without mishap. The Parisians themselves certainly did not stand aloof from the new Centre; on the contrary, some 25,000 visited it during the first eight months of activity.

Ten years it took for the Pro Helvetia Foundation to realize this project of a Swiss Cultural Centre in Paris. And eighteen months to make of the old Hôtel de Poussepin, a 17th century private residence, and its annexe, a centre full of brightness – a patch of light at the back of a courtyard in the greyness of the quarter. Feats of ingenuity were performed to house, in the space available, and in overall harmony, offices, technical sections, concert hall (which retains the intimate character of a *théâtre de poche* while affording a high standard of comfort to 100–150 auditors), a 2,260 sq. ft showroom well provided with natural light and a library of 4,000 Swiss books (to begin with, all contemporary works) designed also to serve as a lecture, meeting and reading room. And the «visiting card» of the Centre: the reception bureau on the Rue des Arbalétriers, which sells Swiss magazines, dailies and new publications.

The seven persons responsible for the activities of the Centre are organized autonomously, i.e. each has the responsibility for a particular section. This system has enabled the Centre to get through the running-in phase without mishap and to meet the demands expected of it. Thus, a first lively and chequered year in which a wide spectrum of different forms of expression found place, has come to a successful end. Highlights? Certainly the studies in honour of Paul Sacher; the show devoted to the architect Luigi Snozzi; or the retrospective of the

best documentaries produced by the TSR (TV service of French-speaking Switzerland) these last ten years.

In the field of theatre, however, one of the most enjoyable events was the play *Écritures en Jeu* which stimulated reflection on the author's motives and views as



Hôtel de Poussepin

well as on the staging of a text; a success even greater for the fact that the eight plays read are all currently either being, or will be, produced.

The principle of giving *carte blanche* to an author or a publisher also proved to be a very promising idea which, incidentally, has already had a certain measurable impact: for example, Michel Moret, the publisher of *L'Aire*, increased his sales tenfold at the *Salon du Livre*, an achievement which he attributes in large measure to his having participated at the Poussepin Centre.

There is no doubt that within twelve months the Swiss Cultural Centre in Paris has attained the standing of the other foreign cultural centres in the French capital – perhaps even with a touch of extra imagination. And despite the tightness of the funds available, the Poussepin team has fulfilled its contract in two important respects: to be first and foremost this «liaison agent» between artist and public, and not to become in any way a sort of Swiss enclave in Paris.

A good hundred constructive and creative artists have already been able to benefit from the working facilities available at the Centre. And those who have passed by have noted and praised the quality of the information work and publicity done for their benefit by the Centre. Besides, the hoped-for rebound has actually happened for many who have enlisted the Centre's services – in the form of theatre engagements, invitations to show at art galleries abroad and so forth.

In Year Two it will be a matter of keeping up the interest of the public by further widening the range of projects and events. The programme for the new season is headed determinedly in this direction with an exhibition devoted to the cartoonist Poussin and to the theatrical staging of one of his strips. In particular, there has already been the stage adaptation of Fritz Zorn's *Mars*, in co-operation with the *Festival d'Automne*, and an exhibition of photographs on Alberto Giacometti.

Certainly, the stake invested in the old Hôtel de Poussepin will cause ripples extending far beyond the Centre, for it could well become the model for other Swiss cultural centres abroad, particularly where a need has been felt, as, for example, in Italy, Austria and W. Germany. ●

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author and free-lance journalist