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Autor: Ziegler-Fischer, Rita
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Out-of-the-ordinary museums

Visiting cats, smugglers and dolls

Swiss musical boxes as well as other mechanical musical instruments were exported all over the world in the 18th century. Not-so-silent witnesses to this can today be admired in some few museums: the collection of automatons of the Jaquet-Droz brothers in the *Musée d'Art et d'Histoire* in Neuchâtel has become famous for its dolls which write, draw and play music; and two museums in Sainte-Croix and L'Auberson in the Jura Vaudois take us into the wonderland of music boxes, barrel organs, old phonographs and large orchestrions.

Exhibitions of folkways always have great appeal: the local history museum of Urnäsch in Appenzell provides a vivid glimpse of traditional usages and customs rooted in the life of the mountain farmer and herdsman, such as the *Silvesterklausen* (a traditional New Year's masquerade), the colourful alpine processions and mountain festivals.

Some of the treasures that the Swiss brought home with them from their years abroad are shown in the Ethnographical Museum in Neuchâtel. Above all, it is its unique supplementary exhibitions that for some years now have built up for this Museum a reputation extending beyond the national borders. These extra shows no longer primarily portray the ethnology of foreign countries but also the ethnology of the daily round and way of life here at home. This year's show is called «Of Animals and People».

Dolls make the hearts of children, and grown-ups too, beat a little faster. Visitors to the small «Jeannine» museum of dolls in Güttingen on Lake Constance can recall

their dreams of childhood. The largest collection of dolls in Switzerland, of more than 400 antique baby dolls, is housed in the little mediaeval town of Stein am Rhein; and the



The exhibition: «Le mal et la douleur» in the Ethnographical Museum, Neuchâtel (photo: Alain Germond).

museum of toys in Riehen near Basle presents some 2,000 old playthings from all over Europe.

Animal lovers, too, can get their money's worth. In Estavayer-le-Lac, François Perrier, an ex-captain in the service of the Pope, spent the last years of his life preserving frogs – and the bizarre stuffed-frog scenes have found a lodging in the museum of local history there. Cat lovers make a pilgrimage to Riehen where a former dealer in antiques has collected more than 5,000 cats from all over the world – cats painted in oils, china cats and, as a real curiosity, a 3,000-year-old mummified cat.

Even in the large museum towns there is the out-of-the ordinary to be seen. Basle has a

museum of international caricatures and cartoons of the 20th century; the old part of Zurich has a collection of hundreds of lead soldiers, among others portraying Hannibal's crossing of the Alps and scenes from the adventures of Robinson Crusoe.

Of course you can meet international personages in museums: the Swiss hero, William Tell, in Bürglen near Altdorf; Henri Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross, in Heiden; and, in the castle of Lucens, Sherlock Holmes's study has been reconstructed.

Houses bring history to life. The turn of the century is revived in the Casa Anatta just above Ascona, when vegetarians, sun worshippers and anarchists used to frequent the *Monte Verità*, the mountain of truth. The Apostle of the Helvetians had his abode, the *Hermitage of St. Beatus*, and was laid to rest in the St. Beatus caves above Lake Thun. The museum there tells you the history of the caves and also gives a cross-section of speleology in Switzerland.

And what else can we see which is out of the way? A smugglers' and customs' museum near the Cantine di Gandria on the lake of Lugano, the Bally shoe museum in Schönenwerd, the collection of over 6,000 model cars in the Monteverdi museum at Binningen and... and... and... A brochure entitled *Out-of-the-Ordinary Swiss Museums*, recently published by the SNTO (Swiss National Tourist Office), gives fuller details about all these museums as well as a good 170 further small collections. It is available free of charge from official Swiss tourist offices.

Rita Ziegler-Fischer

A museum to 10,000 inhabitants

In Switzerland there are now more than 600 museums of every kind, which in fact gives our country the greatest museum density in the world. This number should rise to 700-800 museums by the year 2000, the largest increase today being in the number of *Heimat* (local history and culture) museums.



The museum at Urnäsch (photo: Walter Studer).