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Images of the home country

What is Switzerland? For Jakob Burkhardt it was a society of common interests, for Max Frisch a place of painful confinement. We all have our own images of Switzerland: For my parents Switzerland was the object of their homesickness, while for me it consisted of green alpine pastures and a red aerial cable car, and my classmates imagined a ski paradise brimming over with chocolate.

With the passing of decades, these images have changed and gradually adjusted to a subjective reality. On 1 June I took over from Lukas M. Schneider as editor-in-chief of the Swiss Review. At the same time I took over the project management for the Swiss Abroad Day at Expo.02, as a result of which the long-forgotten question from my childhood – What is Switzerland? – once more surfaced. This time I looked to the Internet for answers. The results were “Heidi”, “Nazi gold” and “Rösti trench”. Abandoning these images as too subjective, I reached for the dictionary: “Surface area: 41,284 square kilometers”.

But what about the mountains? You might be able to measure flat countries this way, but not our Switzerland! If our mountains were to be



Gabrielle Keller

“Actively contribute to the National Exhibition by sending us your personal image of Switzerland”

ironed out flat, we would be a very large country indeed. So this information did not help much.

If we do not even know the real surface area of our country, Ben Vautier may have been right when he claimed that “la Suisse n'existe pas”: There is no real Switzerland! There are, however, millions of images of Switzerland, reflecting comedy and tragedy, disillusionment and pathos. The number of these images make Switzerland what it is. This is why the Swiss Abroad Day on 10 August 2002 is entitled “Images Suisses”. The event, to be held in Bienne as part of Expo.02, will be the highlight of the Congress of the Swiss Abroad. “Images Suisses” will be your day and we are asking now for your assistance in shaping this event. It can be on a sheet of paper or it can be an object, beautiful or awesome, thought-provoking or merely provocative. You can make your “Image of Switzerland” simple or complex. It's your personal statement.

With his statement that “la Suisse n'existe pas”, Swiss Abroad Ben Vautier sparked off a national scandal at the 1992 World Exhibition. Years later he said, “Switzerland does not know what it is and what it means to be Swiss”. Is this really true? It's over to you. I hope you enjoy creating your entry!

Gabrielle Keller

The competition is open to all Swiss nationals with legal place of residence abroad. The entries must be no larger than 70cm x 50cm x 20cm and must arrive before 1 June 2002. All entries shall become the property of the OSA together with the right to publish the works submitted. Send your entries to: Images Suisses – Competition Expo.02, Rotwandstrasse 39, CH-8004 Zurich (Customs declaration: Competition, gift). Include your name, age, address and date of leaving Switzerland. Many thanks and good luck!

Translated from the German by N. Chisholm



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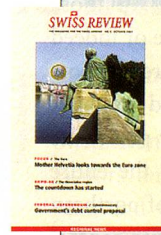
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On 1 January 2002 the Euro will replace the currencies of twelve European countries. What does this mean for Swiss Abroad? Mother Helvetia (by Basle sculptress Bettina Eichin) casts a critical eye over the Rhine to the Euro zone.

COVER: Photo Erwin Zbinden, photomontage Buri Druck AG

SWISS REVIEW

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 28th year of issue and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 20 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 360 000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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