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Switzerland has many faces

What image does Switzerland project? Towards the end of last year we asked readers to send us their image of Switzerland. The response was overwhelming, and a selection of these "Images Suisses" will be exhibited at the Swiss Abroad Day at Expo.02 on 10 August.

Most of the readers who responded to our request decided to make a declaration of love for their home country. The entries included a great many collages, featuring chocolate wrappings, cuttings from old Swiss Reviews, and atmospheric calendar pages, cleverly combined to produce pictures of mountains, alpine huts and blue lakes. Some incorporated political and economic developments: Swissair planes plummeting through blue skies, a Mother Helvetia stooping under the burden of social costs, or suns as sinister, threatening EU symbols.

Does this reflect the image which Swiss Abroad have of our country? Even those who left Switzerland without a backward glance



Gabrielle Keller

"The reality is reduced to what was once held so dear."

appear to suffer from nostalgia after a few years absence: a picture-postcard idyll threatened by change. The reality is reduced to what was once held so dear. The images are touching because they were created with such care and devotion. At the same time they give pause for thought.

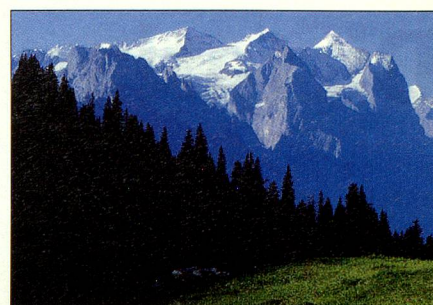
The entries are certainly not representative of the Fifth Switzerland as a whole. While the response exceeded our expectations, the 80 or so pictures and texts we received represent only a fraction of the 360,000 households who will have read our appeal. Most readers did not put their thoughts down on paper - whether due to lack of time or interest, in the mistaken belief that they did not have the right skills, or ambivalence towards the home country, we will never know.

But is Switzerland really as idyllic as our readers portrayed it? Naturally we still boast enchanting Alps, crystal-clear mountain air, blue lakes and melt-in-the-mouth Toblerone, but the world has moved on over the past ten or twenty years, and Switzerland with it. Swiss at home have a much more critical opinion of their country. Overall, Expo.02 reflects the image of a country which no longer wants to act the role of paradigm which fate has handed it, but simply be part of the world.

Perhaps Switzerland is really more banal than we would have it, but we at home all too often lose sight of the beautiful and unique nature of our country. Our thanks, therefore, to you for reminding us of the things which, sooner or later, we would miss if we ever left Switzerland!

Gabrielle Keller

Translated from the German.



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Mountains dictate the identity of Switzerland and its inhabitants. They are also a significant economic factor for our country. The United Nations has declared 2002 the International Year of Mountains.

COVER: Erwin Zbinden

SWISS REVIEW

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 29th year of publication and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 25 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 360 000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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