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The home of athletics

The Olympic Museum in Lausanne, home of the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), is a splendid example of modernity situated in idyllic surroundings on Lake Geneva. It is a centre of art, culture and history as well as a sporting temple. An Olympic visit. By Alain Wey

Citius, Altius, Fortius – faster, higher, stronger – the Olympic maxim engraved into the wall of the museum's entrance sets the tone of this temple dedicated to sport. The notion of exceeding limitations is also reflected in the museum's architecture and its exhibitions. Situated on Lake Geneva in Lausanne, the museum is home to the greatest collection of Olympic artefacts in the world. There are permanent exhibitions on the history of the Olympics and temporary ones on the Olympic Games in Beijing. A fusion of sport and art awaits visitors to the museum. A guided tour.

Renaissance of the Olympics

A whole section of the permanent exhibition is dedicated to the games in ancient Greece

which lasted from 776 B.C. to 393 A.D. The Roman Emperor Theodosius put an end to the Olympics because they were devoted to pagan gods. The Olympic ideal was not reborn until 1894. It was revived by the Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937) who avidly sought to create modern games and to educate young people through sport. While the First World War was raging in Europe, he decided to establish the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne. Visitors are immersed in the history and the origins of the games. Nike, the goddess of victory, is engraved on most Olympic medals. Examples of all of the torches are on display from the first Olympic relay in Berlin in 1936 through to the Turin Win-

ter Olympics of 2006. Homage to the ancient games where the Greeks lit a great fire in honour of Zeus, the Olympic flame carries a message of peace, solidarity and the coming together of peoples.

Art and sport are always closely connected here, as illustrated by a bronze sculpture by Auguste Rodin from 1904 called "The American Athlete". The symbols of the games, its founders and interactive multimedia areas are all features of the exhibition. The five rings symbolising the five continents which appeared for the first time in Antwerp in 1920, the scale of the Olympic movement worldwide, economic aspects, the medals, engravings, coins, stamps and the succession of IOC presidents etc. are all themes that are covered. The second permanent exhibition, "The Athletes and the Games", displays the equipment of the various disciplines of the summer and winter Olympics and their development. Visitors are welcomed by the museum's enormous garden, facing the lake, with its imposing sculptures by great artists. Modernity and interactivity are also key aspects of the per-

The Olympic Museum in Lausanne is situated in a 22'000 m² park.

manent exhibition as it is even possible to hire an mp3 player which provides information on each part of the tour in a variety of languages.

The exhibition on the Beijing Olympic Games

On 8 August 2008 at 8.08 a.m. and 8 seconds, the 29th Olympic Games will open in Beijing. Eight is a lucky number for the Chinese. To mark the occasion, the temporary exhibition, Beijing 2008 (February to October), presents various aspects of the Olympics and Chinese culture in four huge rooms. Superstition features heavily.

The east section displays icons of the games – the torch decorated with clouds that augur well, the medals with a jade disk inset on the reverse side that is supposed to see off evil spirits, the 35 pictograms of the sporting disciplines and the five mascots in the colours of the rings. The west section exhibits the architectural transformation undergone by Beijing to host the games, focusing on two Olympic venues, the Water Cube and the Bird's

Nest. The design of the Water Cube aquatic centre looks like water molecules and is perfectly suited to staging the swimming and diving events. The Bird's Nest Olympic stadium was designed by the Swiss company Herzog & de Meuron. For the Chinese, a bird's nest is a culinary dish, but also a symbol associated with trees, air and nature. The other buildings displayed are the Beijing opera house, representing a pearl emerging from the water, the towers of the national TV station, which look like two towers of Pisa supporting one another, and Beijing airport, resembling a dragon with its wings spread open.

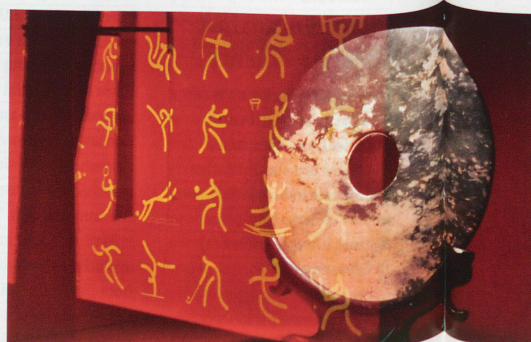
The north section focuses on Chinese culture with its traditional sports and blending with modernity. The emblem of the games is called "dancing Beijing". Work by the artist Li Wei examines sport and the theme of movement and originality. Visitors discover China's diversity with its 56 ethnic groups, its culinary traditions, medicines and contrasts. Finally, the south section, following the contour of the park, concludes the visit with a chronological comparison of Chinese and

European history. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, events and performances bring Chinese culture to life and sporting action is shown on a giant screen.

When you leave the museum opposite the lake and look at the eight Greek columns where engravings commemorate the 28 summer and 20 winter Olympic Games, you cannot help noticing that six columns are reserved for centuries to come. The notion of man seeking to improve transcends time like the Olympic maxim. Going beyond limitations, not in competition with others but with himself to exceed himself and become a better man.

MUSEUM FACTS AND FIGURES

Before the Olympic Museum opened on 23 June 1993, the collections were on display in Lausanne at the Villa Mon-Repos from 1922 to 1970, and then later in a temporary museum. Under the direction of Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the IOC from 1980 to 2001, the new museum was built by the architects Pedro Ramirez Vazquez from Mexico and Jean-Pierre Cahen from Lausanne. Switzerland's fourth most important museum has already received more than 2.5 million visitors, 50% coming from abroad. There are around 200,000 visitors a year, of whom around 30,000 are school children. The museum's 11,000 m² are divided between five floors, and its park is 22,000 m² in size. The museum also has an auditorium with 180 seats, five meeting rooms, a restaurant, a library, a video library and an educational service for schools. Lausanne is also the headquarters of the IOC and the home of Olympic solidarity. www.olympic.org



A glimpse of the temporary exhibition on the Olympic Games in Beijing: the Olympic stadium, the pictograms of all the sporting disciplines and the medals inset with jade.