

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 37 (2010)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Survey : who are the greatest ever Swiss?
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906735>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 22.08.2025

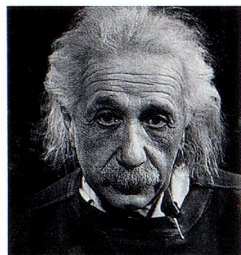
ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Who are the greatest ever Swiss?

Swiss television – Das Schweizer Fernsehen – is planning a series of portraits of major Swiss figures from the past and present. “Swiss Review” would like to know who the Swiss abroad think are the greatest ever Swiss.

This is a splendid topic for discussion and debate. Who are the greatest Swiss ever to have lived? The editorial team at “Swiss Review” has produced short portraits of ten favourites and has suggested an-

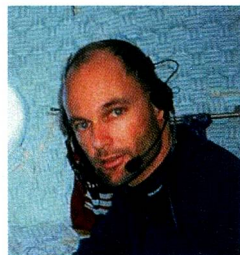
other twenty possible candidates (excluding mystical figures, such as William Tell and Helvetia). Take part in the online survey at www.revue.ch and let us know your top three. We will publish your



Albert Einstein

(1879–1955)

This scientist, who was born in Germany and died in America, is the quintessential research genius. He studied at what is now the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, where he became a professor. This brilliant theoretician's discoveries transformed the way in which scientists view the physical world. In 1999, 100 leading physicists voted him the greatest physicist of all time. In 1922, he received the Nobel Prize for Physics for his work. Einstein's most important achievement was the theory of relativity, which revolutionised the understanding of time and space. He also made groundbreaking contributions in quantum physics. Einstein was committed to achieving peace and understanding between nations. Having been nationalised in Zurich, he was a fervent, life-long advocate of Swiss democracy. A pacifist and an anti-fascist, he was a Jewish figurehead in the struggle against Hitler's Germany. He described his relationship with Switzerland by saying: “I am as fond of this country as it is not fond of me.”



Bertrand Piccard

(born in 1958)

This Lausanne-born psychiatrist, scientist and adventurer comes from a famous family. His grandfather, Auguste Piccard, soared into the stratosphere in a balloon in August 1932, reaching a height of 16,940 metres. His father, Jacques Piccard, dived to the record depth of 10,916 metres in the Mariana Trench. Bertrand Piccard, together with Brian Jones from the UK, set out from Switzerland in the Breitling Orbiter 3 balloon in March 1999 and landed in the Egyptian desert after a flight covering 45,755 kilometres. In 19 days, 21 hours and 47 minutes, he achieved the first circumnavigation of the globe without any intermediate landings. It was the longest flight in terms of duration and distance in aviation history. The Swiss pioneer is now planning an exciting new adventure. He intends to circumnavigate the globe in a light aircraft powered by solar energy. The prototype for the aircraft which weighs just 1,600 kilos and has huge dimensions – 22 metres in length and a 63-metre wingspan – is set to carry out test flights this year.



Henri Guisan

(1874–1960)

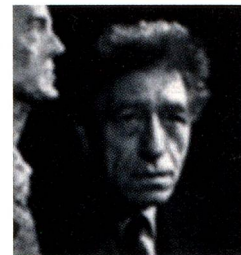
When this Swiss army general from the Second World War was laid to rest in Pully in 1960, 300,000 people turned out to pay their last respects. Henri Guisan, from the canton of Vaud, embodied Switzerland's spirit of resistance in the face of the threat from Germany like nobody else. When the situation in Europe came to a head in the summer of 1939, the United Federal Assembly appointed him General of the Swiss Army – a military rank that does not exist in times of peace. During the war years, Guisan was able to inspire the troops and the Swiss people. His military address on the Rütli, where he announced his “réduit” strategy (the withdrawal of the nucleus of the army into the mountains) is legendary. Guisan became a much-celebrated figure in the post-war period. Many streets and squares were named after him, and his picture still hangs today in some of the more traditional inns. However, historical research has also revealed his sympathy for Italian fascism and a certain conformism to the Third Reich.



Meret Oppenheim

(1913–1985)

This painter, graphic artist, object designer and lyricist, who was born in Berlin and died in Basel, was an internationally renowned exponent of surrealism. In 1933, she met Max Ernst and Hans Arp in Paris who were enthralled by her work. She produced various famous pieces of art during this period, such as the fur-covered teacup “Déjeuner en fourrure” (Lunch in fur) created in 1936. This piece, acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, brought her instant fame as an exponent of surrealism. The nude photographs taken by the artist Man Ray at this time earned her a reputation as the “muse of the surrealists”. In 1959, she staged the “spring celebration” in Berne and Paris with dishes served on the naked body of a woman. She exhibited internationally from 1967 onwards. The fountain she designed in Berne in 1983 sparked a fierce public debate. Meret Oppenheim received the Art Award of the city of Basel in 1974 and the Grand Art Prize of the city of Berlin in 1982.



Alberto Giacometti

(1901–1966)

“L'homme qui marche I”, his monumental sculpture from the early 1960s, achieved the highest price ever raised at auction for a work of art last February, fetching more than CHF 100 million. His most famous work of the walking man can also be seen on the CHF 100 banknote. Alberto Giacometti, born in Borgonovo in the Bregaglia region of Grisons, was a sculptor, painter and graphic artist. After studying in Geneva, he went to Paris, the art capital of the day, in 1922. Apart from a brief interval, he worked there in a simple studio until his death. Giacometti's exceptional artistic talent lay in his spatial perception. His subject was the integration of the emptiness of space and the figures found within it. His figures were always very thin and long. This space with figures reflects the solitude of modern man like no other artist. Alberto Giacometti died in 1966 of a tobacco-related illness after returning to Switzerland.

favourites in the next issue of "Swiss Review". You will find ten portraits of possible candidates on these two pages. Here are a further twenty suggestions (in alphabetical order): Francesco Borromini (architect), Mario Botta (architect), Calvin (reformer), Le Corbusier (architect), Guillaume-Henri Dufour (general), Max Frisch (writer), Jeremias Gotthelf (writer), Albert Hofmann (chemist), Jürg Jenatsch (freedom fighter), Carl Gustav Jung (psychoanalyst), Gottfried Keller (writer), Ferdinand Kübler (sportsman), Gertrud Kurz ("mother of refugees"), Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (writer), Pi-

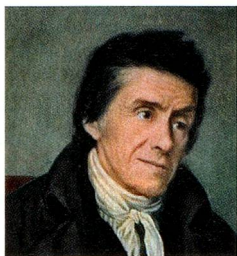
lotti Rist (video artist), Iris von Roten (feminist), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (philosopher), Annemarie Schwarzenbach (author), Sophie Taeuber-Arp (artist) and Huldrych Zwingli (reformer).



Friedrich Dürrenmatt

(1921–1990)

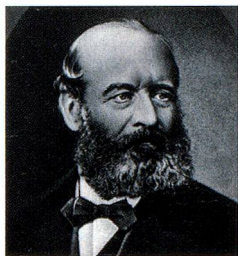
This author, painter and writer of philosophical prose was one of the most performed playwrights in German-language theatre in the second half of the 20th century. His comedies, which are still performed today, look at the issue of the freedom and guilt of individuals in a world of anonymous power systems. His first play "Es steht geschrieben" (It Is Written) from 1947 caused a scandal in the theatre world in Zurich. In 1952, he achieved his breakthrough as a dramatist in Germany with "Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi" (The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi). His play "Der Besuch der alten Dame" (The Visit) from 1956 brought Dürrenmatt worldwide fame, as did "Die Physiker" (The Physicists) from 1962. He later experienced a number of failures with new comedies which he partially directed himself. Dürrenmatt started to move more towards philosophical prose and wrote commentaries that were critical of the times. Dürrenmatt, who lived in Neuchâtel from 1952 until his death, was also an original painter and artist. He received various awards and honorary doctorates.



Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi

(1746–1827)

The picture of this benevolent philanthropist sometimes used to hang in schools. His 1801 book "Wie Gertrud ihre Kinder lehrt" (How Gertrude Teaches Her Children) was found in many libraries and living rooms. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi was a Swiss pedagogue, an educational and social reformer, a philosopher, a politician, and, above all, a great philanthropist. He was particularly interested in the elementary education of children, which he believed should begin in the family before school. He fostered an all-embracing, harmonious approach to children's intellectual, moral, religious and practical education. He put his pedagogical ideas, which he systematically set out for the first time in the above-mentioned book, into practice at his almshouse in Neuhof, at the orphanage in Stans and, in particular, at his institutes in Burgdorf and Yverdon. Some of his extensive political and pedagogical writings seem antiquated and overstated today. However, his basic ideas are still found in modern pedagogy.



Alfred Escher

(1819–1882)

The monument in front of Zurich's main station is in honour of probably the greatest Swiss statesman ever and the founder of modern Switzerland. Alfred Escher dominated Swiss politics for decades. He was a member of the National Council for 34 years and its President four times. Thanks to the prominent positions he held in politics and business and his wide network of contacts, he possessed unique power. The name Escher is associated with various pioneering historical achievements, such as the north-east railway, the construction of the Gotthard tunnel, the Swiss Polytechnic (today the Federal Institute of Technology Zurich), the Schweizerische Kreditanstalt (now Credit Suisse) and the Schweizerische Rentenanstalt (now Swiss Life). His most ambitious project was the construction of the Gotthard tunnel, which began in 1873. Escher, who withdrew from the project in 1878, was criticised for construction problems and additional costs. He was not invited to the Gotthard tunnel's breakthrough ceremony in 1880. Alfred Escher died a lonely, embittered and ostracised figure in 1882.



Henri Dunant

(1828–1910)

This humanist and idealist from Geneva received the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901 for his lifetime work. The pivotal episode in Henri Dunant's life came on 24 June 1859 on a battlefield strewn with dead and wounded near the northern Italian town of Solferino, where the army of Austria had fought with troops from Piedmont-Sardinia and France. In his book "Eine Erinnerung an Solferino" (A Memory of Solferino) he developed the vision of a neutral aid organisation made up of volunteers who would look after the wounded. Shortly afterwards, an international aid organisation for care of the wounded, which has been called the International Committee of the Red Cross since 1876, was founded in Geneva. The first Geneva Convention concluded in 1864 draws on proposals set out in Dunant's book. Business problems led to his exclusion from Geneva society and the Red Cross Committee. Henri Dunant lived as a forgotten man in poverty for another thirty years and died alone in Heiden in Appenzell.



Johanna Spyri

(1827–1901)

The novel "Heidis Lehr- und Wanderjahre" (Heidi's Years of Wandering and Learning) was published just before Christmas in 1879 and became an instant global success. The second novel "Heidi kann brauchen was es gelernt hat" (Heidi Makes Use of What She Has Learned) appeared the following year. The Heidi novels were translated into more than 50 languages and sold over 20 million copies. Various film adaptations have also been produced. Johanna Spyri wrote the bestseller, but her character "Heidi" is more famous than she is herself. The author was a woman of her time – conservative, bourgeois and devout. She wrote in secret and hid her manuscripts in her writing table. "The household is the only proper place for a lady", she told her niece. In the 30 years between 1871 and her death, Johanna Spyri published 48 stories. Her writing takes a critical look at Switzerland and the living conditions of people in the early industrial period. Despite being bound by the conventions of her day, Spyri produced magnificent achievements.