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From Switzerland out into the great wide world

The Swiss National Museum in Schwyz invites visitors to reflect on the topic of emigration with its exhibition "Switzerland elsewhere".



Let's start by taking a look at this photo. We see a young couple with a child sitting on top of a bulging suitcase. He is wearing high lace-up boots and a rather crumpled-looking hat; however, his tie knot is sitting perfectly. She in turn seems to be dressed for a fun Sunday outing. They both have a look of expectation. Or is it tension and insecurity? A number of things are not immediately apparent in the photo. We are in Zurich Main Station, around 1930, in front of the smoking section of a third-class SBB carriage – and the couple are part of a contingent of 40 destitute Swiss unemployed who are travelling to Brazil to start a new life as planters in the back country. It was in essence state-subsidised export of poverty. The Emergency Association for

Waiting to depart
at Zurich Main Station,
around 1930
Photo: Keystone

Settlement and Emigration (ANSA) agency was subsidised by the Confederation to support willing emigrants.

The remarkable exhibition "Switzerland elsewhere" in Schwyz touches on memories such as these of Switzerland as a land of emigration. The exhibition recounts the stories of past and present migrants, explores their reasons for leaving and their hopes and dreams, discusses the foundation of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad (OSA), and finally also reveals just how much migrant movements are the historical norm.

The exhibition is of particular value for visitors from "The Fifth Switzerland" who are on holiday in Switzerland, especially as they are directly addressed at various supporting events. To this end, the exhibition will transform itself into an "Office for Migration Stories" from 1.00 pm to 4.00 pm on 11 and 22 September 2019. Visitors will be invited to share their family's migration stories and have them written down.

A new book lends additional depth to the exhibition. Leo Schelbert's work "Switzerland elsewhere" uses the examples of hundreds of Swiss men and women to show the diverse ways that a nation can make its mark in the world. With soldiers and missionaries, professional people and emigrants in search of the proverbial pot of gold and a better life. In this way, the book also underscores that nations have never been self-contained structures; rather, they have always been and will continue to be interconnected with the world.

(MUL)

■ "Switzerland elsewhere" exhibition, Swiss National Museum, Forum of Swiss History Schwyz, Zeughausstrasse 5, 6431 Schwyz. The exhibition runs until 29 September 2019. www.nationalmuseum.ch/e/schwyz/

■ Leo Schelbert: "Von der Schweiz anderswo. Historische Skizze der globalen Präsenz einer Nation." (German edition) / "Switzerland elsewhere. Historical sketch of the Global Presence of a Nation" (English edition); 320 pages, hardcover, Limmat Verlag, 8031 Zurich; 38 francs / 40 euros.

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