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VALUABLE PICASSO PICTURES REMAIN IN SWITZERLAND

Basle testifies to its Reputation as Cultural Centre PICASSO'S REWARD

There has hardly been a controversy in Switzerland in recent months which has dominated public discussion as much as the threatened sale of two costly Picasso pictures. The valuable art collection Rudolf Staechelin was deposited at the Basle Art Gallery and makes up a substantial part of the Modern Section. This was in agreement with the Staechelin Family and the Trust Council. According to the deed, the collection must remain intact unless one of the descendants falls on bad times. This has now happened. As a consequence of the unfortunate insolvency of the Globe-Air Company, Mr. Peter Staechelin got into debt, and the Council had to agree to a sale of some of the valuable pictures. Thus, Van Gogh's "Berceuse" left Basle without the town having a chance to buy it. But proceeds were not enough to pay the debts, and more pictures had to be sold. Immediately, the Cantonal Government and the Management of the Art Gallery opened negotiations to save at least the bulk of the collection.

Agreement was reached after difficult and lengthy parley, the Municipality was to pay 8.4 million francs for two older Picasso works "Les deux frères" (1905) and "Arlequin assis" (1923), and would have the unconditional loan of twelve additional pictures for 15 years. Next, the Government proposed and the Grand Council almost unanimously approved a credit of 6m. francs, provided that the remaining sum would be forthcoming from private sources.

The response was reassuring not only in Basle, but also in other Swiss towns. Nevertheless, there was sizable opposition, and a Referendum was started which attracted the required number of signatures, and consequently, as is the law in Switzerland with its direct democratic system, the citizens were called to the poll.

The controversy raged. The opponents brought out a formidable list of wonderful things the money could provide, from flats for old people and other welfare schemes to the new building for the Municipal Theatre and public conveniences! The supporters pointed out the vast sums which had been buried in the *Bürgerspital* with nothing much to show for it. They also drew attention to the value of the pictures which were in demand all over the world at a much higher price than that negotiated.

In no time at all, the required 2.4m. was raised by many different means. As a few examples may be given the collection of Fr. 3000.— made amongst professors of Geneva University, a tombola arranged by the Basle Section of the Swiss Society of Painters, Sculptors and Architects, with some of their own works as prizes, a cheque for Fr.26,000.— taken to Basle by Zurich's Municipal President in person.

But the most original scheme was the "Bettlerfest" organised with true Basle wit and imagination at the last week-end in November. It was estimated that 100,000 people took part, and there was no end to the ingenuity with which stalls and individual sales were run. Even members of the Government served at improvised inns. Art College students collected money as pavement artists, there were rides in veteran cars and on penny-farthings, hot dogs and coffee were served on trams, Picasso soup

was sold and ceramics made by Basle artists were for sale at collectors' prices, and when all the goods were sold, even the stalls were dismantled and put up for sale. The Mayor of Zurich was received with honours — genuine Basle carnival style.

And the result? 200,066 francs and 67 *Rappen*. The verdict of the voters was yet to come. Not everybody was as optimistic as the well-known poet Blasius who wrote in the "Basler Nachrichten":

Soll i oder soll i nit?

"I has nit gärn, wenns in der Schwyz vom Basler spettisch haisst, dass zwische Sparsamkait und Gyz er mängmool lycht entglaist. Mer dien — so sait me — sehr profund und gscheit und gaischtig fit und sinn e Gnorzi-Club im Grund. Sag, simmers oder nit?"

"I has nit gärn, wenn notinoo e Stadt ihr Gsicht verliert und wenn si coram publico mit ihre Schetz huusiert. Ob alt, ob ney, das isch mer glych, d'Kunscht goht durs Läbe mit, in ihrem Zaiche simmer rych. Sag, simmers oder nit?"

"Mer sinns, solange mer anesteht, s Härz offe grad wie d'Hand, fir das, wo läbig isch und scheen, au gege Widerstand. I glaub an unsre guete Stärn; am Bättlerfescht heschs gseh. Dert hämmer A gsait lut und gärn, morn sait der Basler B."

He was right, the citizens of Basle did say an unmistakable YES, and the Referendum was lost. 32,118 men and women were for and 27,190 against, with a voting participation of just under 40%, unusually high for a *Sachgeschäft*. The joy when the result was announced knew no bounds, but an even greater Christmas present was to come:

Pablo Picasso was so delighted with the courage and determination of the citizens of Basle that he presented the town with

four pictures from his own collection

"La famille" (1906), "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon" (watercolour study of the painting in New York) (1907), "Une figure et un verre" (1967) and "Vénus et l'amour" (1967), the latter each nearly 2 metres high.

The town was still waiting for the pictures whose transport was slightly delayed due to French customs formalities, when another present was handed over: Mrs. Maja Sacher, wife of the eminent conductor Paul Sacher, gave the town a valuable Picasso picture from her own collection "Le Poète" (1912). She dedicated the picture with the following words "A gift from Maja Sacher, in gratitude and joy. The great initiative and pledge of our population, especially its youth, to acquire the two Picasso pictures has confirmed Basle's reputation as a town of culture". The picture is one of the rare cubist portraits of Picasso and constitutes a valuable addition to the whole Modern Collection.

The four Picasso pictures arrived in Basle on 5th January, and the experts at the museum worked feverishly in order to get them on show as quickly as possible. Already on Saturday morning the nineteen Picasso works were united in one hall and presented to the eagerly expectant public. Many visitors have found their way to the Art Gallery for the first time. Amongst the early arrivals were school classes who spent their drawing lessons busily copying.

"THE PICASSO ARE HERE."

(Compiled by the Editor from material received by the courtesy of "Basler Nachrichten" and A.T.S.)

EXHIBITIONS IN BASLE

The year that has just expired was rendered significant by a series of exceptional events, starting with the 5th Exhibition of Contractors' Machinery (18th-26th February) with 65,000 sq. metres of exhibition space, 100 exhibitors, 30,000 visitors, an impressive evidence of the new technical developments registered in the building machinery industry. Then came the 51st Swiss Industries Fair (15th-25th April, 166,600 sq.m. of exhibition space, 2,665 exhibitions, 1,040,000 visitors) representing, with its large number of exhibitors and the powerful attraction of a national display of Swiss-made goods, a decisive step forward into the 6th decade of exhibitions held in Basle. The 5th International Textile Machinery Exhibition, ITMA 67, which took place in the autumn from 27th September to 6th October, was by far the largest and most important trade exhibition ever held in Switzerland, and it covered 72,500 sq.m. of net stand space, there were 881 exhibitors, and 380,000 visitors from 105 countries. The successful holding of ITMA, which had previously taken place in Lille, Brussels, Milan and Hanover, definitely enabled Basle to establish its position as one of the great, internationally recognised

exhibition centres. The next event to take place was the 3rd International Exhibition of Industrial Electronics, from 14th to 18th November. Known at INEL 67 it covered an exhibition space of 25,000 sq.m. and there were 450 exhibitors and 35,000 visitors. Thanks to the comprehensive display of goods offered by 17 leading industrial countries, the exhibition was able to establish its reputation as an event of Continental importance. The last big show in 1967 was the International Catering and Hotel Exhibition, IGEHO 67, which was held from 22nd to 28th November, covered 36,000 sq.m. of exhibition space, had 400 exhibitors and registered 20,000 visitors. Apart from its success as a business event, the exhibition made a great impression on the catering and hotel trades.

For 1968 there are seven exhibitions due to take place in Basle

The first half of the year will be taken up by the 2nd International Mechanical Handling Exhibition, IFM 68 (7th-14th February) with its characteristic emphasis on the problems raised by methods or rationalisation, the 52nd Swiss Industries Fair (20th-30th April), a national business event of international importance, and IPHARMEX 68 (13th-17th June), the first international Pharmacy Exhibition to be held in Switzerland and dealing particularly with the modernisation and re-equipment of chemists' shops. The second half of the year will see INTERFEREX 68, the 5th International Exhibition for Hardware, Tools and Household Goods (1st-3rd September), followed by ILMAC 68, the 4th International Exhibition of Laboratory, Chemical Engineering, Measurements and Automation Techniques in Chemistry (9th-14th September), then comes HOLZ 68, an exhibition of Woodworking Machinery and Appliances (28th September-6th October), and the exhibition year will close with FAWEM 68, the 1st exhibition for Machine-Tools and Tools (15th-24th November).



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