



## National Museums in Switzerland

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### Summary

The confederate form of its government and the cantonal structure of the Swiss state largely conditions Switzerland's museum geography. Cultural affairs are not generally managed by the federal government but are traditionally the jurisdiction of the cantons, and all except a handful of Switzerland's 949 museums are not national (Federal Department for the Interior, 2005: 3). The birth of Switzerland's first national museum was long and arduous and great apprehension was repeatedly expressed at the idea of such an institution. For many Swiss, it represented an obvious contradiction to the state's federal-national principal. In the years between the establishment of the first Helvetic Republic (1798-1803) up until the creation of the Swiss confederate state in 1848 and following, no national museums of any kind were founded. A material reason for this was that the creation of the Federal state was not accompanied by any massive movement of secularization, such as that which had, in France, transferred huge quantities of church possessions and artworks into the hands of the state. In Switzerland, the secularization of ecclesiastical treasures was a gradual process going back to the period of the Reformation and thus predating national concerns. This process had already given rise to many local and regional museum institutions, as a well-developed pre-national principal that boasted fine collections of international stature. Indeed, the project for a national museum presented an obvious difficulty as it implied choosing one place where the country's national heritage would be presented and represented. However diplomatic difficulties were overturned by the need to stop the sale and export of Swiss antiquities abroad. Yet, since the establishment of the *Landesmuseum*, in Zurich in 1890, the national museum institution has, though somewhat half heartedly, tried to expand to provide more territorial representativity than the existence of one unique institution established in Zurich can offer. It has only, in the last two decades, come to include the museum of the Château de Prangins in French Switzerland and the *Forum Schweizer Geschichte Schwyz*, in the German speaking Alpine region (cf. Annex table). The *Forum* (1995) is, in a sense, the first museum to have been founded to celebrate an idea of the Swiss nation (the *Landesmuseum* was itself founded to deal with the exodus of Swiss material culture). Its foundation celebrates the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Swiss confederation.

In many traditional and high profile fields of collecting, such as the fine arts, especially contemporary art and foreign old masters, ethnography and classical antiquities, Switzerland's largest and most significant museums are either municipal, cantonal or private institutions. The federal government generally has no or little involvement in the promotion of contemporary artistic expression. In terms of subject matter, Switzerland's nationally owned museums deal mainly with traditional artistic practices or historical issues of national or local importance. Most authors underline the fact that the Swiss museum landscape is extremely varied and fragmented. The difficulty of obtaining a clear overview and statistical information concerning questions of financing and management of Swiss museums is a problem indicated by various sources (Brülisauer, Schüle, 2004). Yvette Jaggi, president of the Suisse federal cultural foundation, has

commented on the absence of public debate concerning a federal cultural policy as a possible consequence of Switzerland's plurilingual society, which, though source of cultural diversity and richness, also makes communication and exchange more difficult (Pro Helvetia, 2005: 8). The selection of museums chosen in the table below, and in the case studies, shows that Switzerland's most important 'national' museums do not necessarily correspond with Switzerland's most important museums, according to criteria of visitor numbers or general renown. In terms of art museums for example, and as included in the annex, the collections of Basel, Bern, Geneva or the *Kunsthaus* of Zurich are more renowned than those of the *Landesmuseum*. Furthermore, only two of the selected museums are directly run by the Federal state as part of the official network of Federal museums. Indeed, this selection is based on two principals allowing us to go beyond to the very strongly restricted *Swiss national museum* label (since 2010 it includes only 3 museums). The museums chosen are all mainly financed by the Federal state and their narrative is clearly of 'national' scope, in the Swiss context.

## Summary table, Switzerland

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
Swiss National Museum,  <i>Schweizerischen Landesmuseum, Museo Nazionale Svizzero, Musée National Suisse</i>	1898	1883, 1890 (Federal foundation)	Swiss federal parliamentary act, city of Zurich.	State, autonomous establishment run by a museum council elected by federal parliament.	Medieval Art, Religious History, National History, Pre-historic and Ancient Archaeology	Swiss cultural history, period rooms, weapons and armour, military history, regional arts and crafts, clothing.	5000 BC to 20 <sup>th</sup> c.	Neo-Gothic castle, 19 <sup>th</sup> c. Zurich.
<i>Swiss Alpine Museum</i>  <i>Schweizerisches Alpines museum</i>	1934 (current building)	1905	Federal funding. Dept. of Environment, Transport and Energy.	Municipal, Cantonal	History, Geology, Cartography, Alpinism	Alpine region.	Pre-history (ca. 10 000) to present day.	Modern purpose built construction Bern.
Swiss Open-Air Museum, Ballenberg	1978	1939	Federal and cantonal authorities, Fund for the "Swiss Open Air Museum".	Private run by foundation	Country Architecture, Country Life, Cultural History	Living culture and customs of Switzerland, representing all regions and craft techniques.	17 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> c.	Regional styles of architecture, Canton of Bern, Ballenberg.
Château de Prangins Swiss National Museum	1998	1975	Donations to the Suisse Confederation from the cantons of Vaud and Geneva.	State (SNM)	National political and economical history, 18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> c.	Modern Swiss History.	1730-1920	Castle dating from 1730, Prangins, Lake Geneva.
Neuchâtel: Latenium, Park and archaeological museum	2001	1979	Federal and cantonal authorities.	Cantonal	Archaeology	Archaeology of the region of Neuchâtel and Môtiers.	500 000 BC to 1500 A.D.	Purpose built Modernist structure, Neuchâtel.

## General aspects of the history of Swiss museums

Although Switzerland's territory boasts some of the world's oldest museums, the *Historischesmuseum* in Basel goes back to the public display of the cabinet of Boniface Amerbach, the legal heir of Erasmus of Rotterdam in the seventeenth century. As a federal nation, the Swiss were relatively late in joining the nineteenth century race for the creation of prestigious national museums. During the period between the first Helvetic Republic (1798-1803), dominated by France, up until the creation of the Swiss confederate state of 22 cantons (today 23) in 1848, and the years following its establishment, no museum related to any kind of 'national' discourse came into being. The creation of the Federal state was not accompanied by any massive movement of cultural material, as had been the case in France. The secularisation of ecclesiastical treasures for example, was a gradual process going back to the period of the Reformation; it had, since the sixteenth century, led to the creation of a series of municipal museums. However from 1870 onwards, the country saw a massive wave of local and regional museums being created (Lafontant Vallotton, 2007: 13) and, whilst in 1889 a confederate study counted 40 museums, by 1914 this number had risen to 130.

Swiss museums were, from the outset, run by municipal or cantonal authorities, attached to major urban centres, often founded by private persons or associations and historically based on cantonal treasures and ecclesiastic collections that had very ancient origins. Yet the most important municipal museums were of course also influenced by the major evolutionary stages that founded the federal state. The city of Geneva, for example, had a project for the creation of a universal museum inspired by the model of the Louvre in the 1790s and received paintings from the French state in 1805 and so, in a sense, its museum of art and history is related to the movement of museum creation that grew with, and in parallel to, the French Revolution (Lapaire, 1991: 7). The years running up to and following the creation of the confederate state, were also very important in the history of the major municipal museums such as the *Kunstmuseum* of Basel (reopened in a more important building in 1849); the *Historisches Museum* of Bern, first opened as the town treasure to the public in 1840 and the *Kunsthaus* in Zurich opened its first major permanent collection to the public in 1847 (Deuchler, 1981: 26).

Swiss confederation, established as a result of the victory of the progressive, protestant cantons in the War of the Sonderbund (the civil war of 1847), was a fragile construction in urgent need of a national identity in order to stay the opposition of the conservative catholic secessionist movement. The new confederate nation was built on very deeply rooted religious, linguistic, cultural and ethnic divisions. It was clear that a federal identity could only be constructed by affirming the existence of a common history and geography (Kaeser, 2006: 181). Yet, a national policy in the field of arts, culture and history only slowly began to take form between 1848 and 1874, and it was not until a revision of the Constitution in 1874 that the federal authority could claim enough authority to begin working on the establishment of two major national cultural institutions: the National museum in Zurich and the National Library in Berne, which opened in 1895 (Jost, 1988: 13).

After a long period of negotiations, Zurich was selected as host city and in exchange for this privilege the municipality was to finance the building of the new museum and the core of its collections. The other principal contestant was the federal capital of Berne, its bid for the national

museum lead to the expansion of the major historical museum in that city, interestingly more universal in scope than that created as national in Zurich (Basel and Lucerne were also in the running).

In terms of national state-owned museums, there were no further important creations in the first half of the twentieth century, aside from the *Schloss Wildegg*, a donated domain that opened to the public in 1912. The castle boasts 35 rooms decorated by the Wildegg family, including original furniture, arms and porcelains. The interiors span from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century and represent the life of a powerful Swiss family over 11 generations.

One of the most recent national museums, the Forum of Swiss History in Schwyz (1995) was founded to celebrate the 700th anniversary of Swiss confederation which commemorates a defence alliance charter against Austrian occupation made between three rural communes in 1291 and that, at the end of the eighteenth century, came to symbolise the origins of Swiss unity. It mainly illustrates and celebrates aspects of everyday culture in Switzerland from 1300 to 1800. A small state run customs museum opened its doors in a former border guard's outpost in 1949 and was nationalized in 1970; in dealing with the question of frontiers and Swiss neutrality, it addresses a very characteristic theme of Swiss nationhood. With the castle of Prangins, opened 100 years after the *Landesmuseum*, the SMN is finally represented in French speaking territory (it is halfway between Lausanne and Geneva). The official website states that the visitor is invited to "Discover History: Switzerland between 1730 and 1920. In Prangins, the visitor encounters a modern, democratic and industrialised Switzerland". The museum develops a more directly historical perspective, touching on the political, economic, social and cultural development of Switzerland and its diplomatic and economic relations with its neighbours. In this sense, it employs a very different approach to that of the *Landesmuseum* in Zurich, which is essentially occupied with presenting the evolution of material culture. It filled a gap in Swiss museum culture for a history museum in the full sense; an absence that had been deplored by Schärer in his preface to the 1984 guide to Swiss museums (Lapaire, Schärer, 1984: 32). Although only twelve percent of Swiss museums are classified as historic whilst twenty-five percent fall into the category of art and decorative arts museums, all the museums of the SNM essentially fall into the category of history museums (though they may be said to be of both categories). They currently, nearly exclusively, display material culture and themes directly related to Switzerland's national territory but we must add that they are only, in a very limited manner, museums of political or military history. These figures, given by Schärer, are doubtlessly very approximate (we find similar figures in Brülisauer and Schüle's EGMUS report of 2004), but interesting from a comparative point of view as they can be easily reversed: for example if we chose to class Swiss local museums (*heimatmuseen*, mainly encyclopaedic collections of local customs and natural history) that constitute forty percent of all the museums in Switzerland as history museums (which is not the case in Schärer classification). This would bring the percentage of museums dealing with some aspect of local or national Swiss history to a high fifty percent.

In terms of the representation of other civilizations, interestingly none of the federally-owned museums are dedicated to objects or themes pertaining to territories beyond Switzerland's frontiers. The largest universal collection covering extensive territories outside of Switzerland is not national but municipal and is probably Geneva's museum of art and history. The greatest fine arts collections of Switzerland were, for the most part, already existent as municipal museums

when the Zurich *Landesmuseum* was created in 1898. Encyclopaedic museums with collections aiming for universal scope were created in nearly every major Swiss town during the nineteenth century (Lapaire, Schärer, 1984: 25).

Ownership becomes a complex question once we leave the clearly definable management structures of federal run museums and large municipal museums. “There is no reliable investigation concerning the ownership structure in Swiss museums. It has to be stressed, that divided ownership structure often occurs. Therefore it needs to be asked, who is the legal body of the museum, who owns the collection, who is in possession of the house and who manages the institution.” (Brülisauer, 2006: 3) This is true for a series of museums that we can discuss here as devoted to themes of national interest, some examples are the Schloss Landshut – Swiss Museum for Wildlife and Hunting (1968); Museum of Swiss Citizens Abroad (*Musée des Suisses dans le Monde* - 1964). Others present types of productions, industries that have acquired national status: the Local Watchmaking Museum (*Musée d'Horlogerie du Locle* – 1959) or the *Alimentarium* funded by Nestlé and created in 1985.

## **National museums and cultural policy in Switzerland**

In Switzerland, the federal government finances nine percent of all cultural activities (Pro Helvetia, 2005: 30). In the article ‘Culture and State’, a guide to Swiss cultural policy states that it is the federal government’s doctrine not to exert any kind of influence over the form of the cultural activities across the country and an important ideological point is that, at no point, may it be seen to promote any tendency that might be interpreted as an attempt to found a ‘state culture’, a concept which it claims to be absolutely alien to the reality of Switzerland. Indeed, this doctrine has been expressed in the Swiss constitution. Article 69 of Switzerland’s federal constitution stipulates that cultural affairs are the clear jurisdiction of the towns and cantons.

### **Major municipal museums of national significance**

This means that, in the case of Switzerland (as in that of other countries), the question of important municipal or cantonal museums also needs to be addressed from a national perspective. Today, although federal involvement has increased, cantons and cities continue to provide the majority of resources in the cultural domain (Weckerle, 2010: 3). It is under municipal and cantonal tutelage that the greatest museum boom of Switzerland in the last half of the twentieth century took place with figures rising from 274 museums in 1960 to the very high figure of 1073 in 2010. As already touched upon above, many of these museums are of national significance, their development would appear to also have been influenced by the evolution of the nation-state and nationalism. The decades before and after the turn of the century saw the creation of Switzerland’s most important municipal museums, many are considered by Florens Deuchler (1981: 36) as having ‘überregionaler Bedeutung’, a significance that goes beyond their regional denomination. In some cases they quite simply own the most important holdings in the country for certain standard type collections, and so the question of why this is the case needs to be answered in this context as indicative of the relationship between the national and the regional in the geography of cultural diffusion so specific to Switzerland. They prove and enforce the absence of a centre and the prominence of the representation of universal values of art and science in the context of cantonal institutions appears to also symbolize this situation.

## **Towards a new federal policy**

In 2000, after long debates concerning the necessity for more efficient federal involvement - a debate which began in 1975 with the so called Rapport Clottu entitled 'Elements for Swiss Cultural Policy' - cumulated in an amendment to article 69 of the constitution. It was henceforth to be stipulated that the federal government may intervene to encourage the arts and culture that 'present a national interest' however in 'accomplishing this mission it is to take into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country'. It is difficult at this point to evaluate what effect this will have in future on the network of Switzerland's national museums which, as we will show below, has already tried to establish better territorial coverage.

We can get a clearer picture of the ideology of Swiss cultural policy by considering the Suisse national culture foundation: *Pro Helvetia*. Founded in 1939, in the context of the rising menace of its belligerent neighbour, Germany to Swiss culture, it literally means 'for the defence of Switzerland's spirit' and its origins are based on an idea of culture as the expression of national identity, an idea that, in Switzerland, is considered synonymous with cultural diversity (Pro Helvetia, 2007: 25). *Pro Helvetia's* principal mission is to provide a fund for the promotion of comprehension and exchange between different linguistic regions but also between rural and urban areas, conserving and reinforcing cultural specificities and traditions (Pro Helvetia, 2007: 29). However, the main characteristic of its mission to preserve 'traditional culture' appears today to be in contradiction and often conflicts with an attempt to promote new cultural creations. This tension in terms of general cultural policy may explain why Switzerland has no federally-owned museums for contemporary art. Indeed Swiss federal cultural policy may be characterised by a rather marked interest for popular culture and traditional lifestyles.

*Pro Helvetia* (otherwise known as the Arts Council of Switzerland) was transformed into a public foundation in 1949. The main push for a new federal policy was undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s, notably with the establishment of a separate Swiss Federal Office of Culture (OFC) in 1975. Until then, federal involvement in cultural activities was minimal with the exception of resources provided to run the Swiss National Library and Museum. However the relative absence of a clear federal policy including a set of laws regulating the museum network in Switzerland has been the main reason for the major reform of museum policy initiated in 2005. Until then, the museums of the SNM were not related to a real national/federal organisation in the form of a museum network and no clearly identifiable cultural policy could be related to these institutions; federal involvement was intermittent and related to specific political or private initiatives (Federal Department of the Interior, 2005: 5). Five federal departments were involved in the museum's organisation: the Department for the Interior, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of the Environment, Energy, Transport and Communications and the Department of Finance.

The aim of the reform has been to generate a more unified cultural strategy and to give better visibility to federal involvement. In order to better coordinate this effort, the control of federally-funded museums is to be regrouped under the unique tutelage of one federal service, the aforementioned Federal Office for Culture or OFC run by the Federal Department for the Interior. Its activities were structured as a response to the constitutional amendment of 2000. However, the report of the EDI (Ministry for the Interior) on federal museum policy (Federal Department of the Interior, 2005) considered that the SNM as a current grouping of 8

institutions occupied a position whose image as Switzerland's historical national museum needed to be more clearly defined. It also pointed out that it has been all too conditioned by circumstantial development processes, making it an incoherent ensemble. It further considered that some of its houses did not really have 'gesamtschweizerische Bedeutung' i.e. 'significance for Switzerland as a whole', although no set of criteria was ever officially established to judge what might be considered to be of Swiss national significance. In 2007, an additional reform ruled for a reinforced grouping of Swiss national museums under the title *Musée Suisse Gruppe*, with a common, coordinated mission: to exhibit national history, to explore Switzerland's identity and finally to act as a leader in terms of competency and development of professional practice inside of all Swiss museums.

So between 2007 and 2010, the SNM included 8 museums under its administration and has tried to grow in such a way as to be present in as many areas of Swiss national territory as possible: the group referred to as *Musée Suisse Group* included the following institutions: *Landesmuseum Zürich* (1898); *Schloss Prangins* (1998); *Musikautomatenmuseum Seewen* (1900); *Forum Schweizer Geschichte Schmyz* (1995); *Schloss Wildegg* (1912); Swiss Customs Museum Gandria (1978); *Zunftbaus zur Meisen Zürich* (1956); *Museum Bäregasse Zürich* (1976-2008). The federation also financed a series of isolated institutions, through the OFC - related to the state more as a result of chance circumstances (donation etc.) than due to any kind of general policy: *Museo vela*, in Lignoretto; the Oskar Reinhart collection of Winterthur; *Klosteranlage St. Georgen* at Stein am Rhein and the Swiss Alpine museum (Federal Department of the Interior, 2005: annexe 1). In the last decades, the federal government also provided very punctual financial support to about 50 institutions for exhibitions, publications, etc.

This however was not considered effective enough and a law passed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2010 led to a streamlining of the group. This law dissolved the *Musée Suisse Gruppe* but has given the SNM an autonomous legal status, making it independent of the OFC. A museum council whose members are directly elected by the Federal Council directly manages it. It also reduced the group to its three most important museums: *Musée national de Zurich*, *Château de Prangins* and the *Forum Schweizer Geschichte Schmyz*. Control over the former museums of the SNM was given back to the cantons and the cities in which they were situated.

This development of a clear policy in terms of national museums has been accompanied by a strong improvement in terms of the professionalization of museum staff. The *Verband der Museen der Schweiz*, the Association of Swiss museums created in 1966 represents the institutions of the museum in relation to other authorities and promotes exchange between professionals of the museum world (Brülisauer, 1998: 48-49). In 1979, one of the first federal decrees concerning the organisation of Swiss museums prescribed the role of the museum in the 'preservation and care of the collections as well as development of new preservation methods', expressing its commitment to 'scientific research in the field of Swiss and international art and cultural history', and of course the responsibility to 'inform the public'.

However, in 2003, Martin Schärer noted on the absence of any specific educational structure, course or degree for museum professionals in Switzerland up until the beginning of the 1990s, when the *Verband der Museen der Schweiz*, organized for the first time in Switzerland a specialized ten-day course on museology. Since 2001, it participates (with ICOM Switzerland) in the organization of the first real course for museums professionals in Switzerland, a two-year post-

graduate course in museology for practicing professionals created at the university of Basel. The course combines a theoretical and practical approach with internships and considers itself to be interdisciplinary, addressing the needs of ethnologists, art historians, historians and scientists alike.

## **Case studies: Representing the Nation: Origins, Lifestyle, Art**

### **The development of a national museum: Landesmuseum Zurich**

The first national museum in Switzerland was founded by a federal parliamentary act on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1890 and opened in 1898. Several factors contributed to its creation: the development of a nationalist discourse, a new culture of historical research, a quickly developing art market, the exodus of many art works and objects of Swiss production and the desire to provide models for a renewal of traditional arts and crafts.

A form of patriotic discourse related to national antiquities, developed in most European countries during the first half of the nineteenth century developed later in Switzerland than elsewhere (Kaeser, 2004: 31). A culture of historical research emerged in the context of such societies as the Society of Antiquarians founded in Zurich in 1837 (*Gesellschaft für vaterländische Alterthümer*) or the Society of National Antiquities established in Basel in 1832. Likewise the development of the history museum also appeared later here than elsewhere (Lafontant Vallotton, 2007).

It was in 1880 that Salomon Vögelin (1837-1888), a professor of art history and cultural history at the University of Zurich and elected left-wing democrat, presented the first motion for a federal fund in view of financing a National Swiss museum of historical and cultural antiquities; at first to no avail. But the deputy tried again in 1883, in the context of the first major National exhibition being held in Zürich, where an extensive presentation of traditional Swiss ancient art was attracting the general public's attention. Vögelin put forward the quality and the value of this presentation to bring to the attention of his colleagues the problem of the rapid disappearance of Switzerland's antiquities due to growing sales of objects leaving the country with foreign buyers. Repeatedly referring to their creation in most neighbouring states, he reasoned for the need of a national museum as an essential component of every country's natural duty to its people and heritage. He pleaded the 'powerful influence that the visual representation of a people's history might exert on its ideas and actions (Lafontant Vallotton, 2007: 25). Although the idea of a national history museum did not immediately find favour, the necessity of introducing a system to protect Swiss antiquities from leaving the country was recognized – the first step was the creation of the Federal Commission for the conservation of Swiss antiquities (1886), a fund specifically dedicated to the acquisition of any nationally significant antiquities on sale. In the 1880s, the museum's future first director, Heinrich Angst, a Zurich textile merchant, became involved in the combat to stop this outflow. He developed a discourse on the national prejudice caused by artworks being drained out of the country by scrupulous and greedy foreign collectors and merchants, a discourse that proved highly effective for gaining parliamentary support for the project of a national museum.

This political context was accompanied by a debate concerning the renewal of the arts and crafts professions, increasingly menaced by growing industrial production. Alongside the growing

interest for questions of national material culture for the construction of a historical discourse there is also a growing interest for the industrial arts. Their promotion and the development of instruction in this area were becoming primordial concerns for many of the country's museums. The history museum as a developing concept – indeed according to Lafontant-Vallotton (2007: 24) nearly all important Swiss history museums were created between 1870 and 1900 – was invested with a second identity and mission in this context: to provide high quality models of artistic production in order to educate contemporary artists, artisans and other creative skilled workers.

In light of these strong motivational factors and arguments, the principal of the national museum was finally voted by the parliament in 1890. As mentioned above, a bitter competition ensued to decide which city should come to host the national museum; in the running were the towns of Zurich, Bern, Lucerne and Basel (Sturzenegger, 1999). The violence of the parliamentary debate that the situation incurred is very much representative of the tensions that structure Swiss cultural policy, as it pitted the partisans of a strong central state against the federalists (very much supported by the directors of the already numerous large cantonal museums, largely opposed to the idea of a national museum). Angst promoted the town of Zurich as the most suitable city, presenting the idea that it should finance the building of the museum and provide its first collections. Interestingly the federal government established an international committee including three experts to choose the city: Augustus Franks, curator from the British Museum, Alfred Darcel, director of the Cluny museum in Paris and August von Essenwein, director of the *Germanisches Nationalmuseum* in Nuremberg: they chose Bern in consideration of the value of the city's already highly precious and significant collections. However politics prevailed and Zurich was eventually chosen due to a federalist reaction of the parliament, ill inclined to have the political capital also become home to a national museum.

Swiss architect Gustav Gull (1858-1942) constructed the museum between 1892 and 1898. He took the *musée de Cluny* in Paris and the *Germanisches Nationalmuseum* in Nurnberg, both located in medieval ecclesiastical buildings, as models. The *Landesmuseum* however is rather based on a late medieval to early renaissance castle type plan and may be described as a composite historicist building whose aim was to create a coherent relationship between the collections and the building that was to house them (Lafontant Vallotton, 2008: 278). For the elaboration of the interior decoration the architect used as many authentic and antique elements as possible (Draeyer, 1999: 59).

The national museum had been created despite much reticence and fear that it would drain financial resources and works of art from already existing municipal and cantonal institutions. Its status and position in relation to them was thus clearly defined and restricted. In order to maintain harmonious and fruitful relations with other Swiss cantonal museums, it founded an association to unite different museums in a common cause '*Verband der Schweizerischen Altertums-Sammlungen*'. However it remained caught in competitive relationships with the historical museums of Bern and Basel, which both opened their doors in 1894. Bern's collections especially had been considered as superior to those of Zurich in terms of national antiquities but also because they boasted important series of foreign art and archaeology: fields of material culture that the national museum was never to develop, mainly so as not to run into any further competition with other major cantonal and municipal museums.

In 1892, Heinrich Angst was named as the director of Zurich's *Landesmuseum*, chosen for his expertise and connections in the world of the Swiss and international art markets, a necessary quality for a museum that was to be built nearly from scratch. The museum's first collections were made of those donated by the city of Zurich and the objects acquired by the confederation from 1894 onwards. These included the prehistoric collections of the Dr. Victor Gross related to the civilisations *lacustres* and bought by the confederation in 1884. According to Kaeser (2006), **the acquisition of this collection had been** one of the major catalysts for the definite creation of the national museum.

The museum's collecting policies also manifested an interest for objects of 'cultural history' related to the past lifestyles of different categories of the Swiss population: rural artisan work, costumes and agricultural tools. This reorientation towards more historic objects was due to the entry of the collections of the Zurich Society of Antiquarians in 1892 (*Antiquarische Gesellschaft*). So it was conceived of as a museum of *Kulturgeschichte* and, from the beginning, the picturesque was privileged through a series of period rooms; indeed the whole institution was to present itself as 'a picture book of Swiss history' (Schwarz, 1948: 9). For Furger (1998: 11) its scope has considerably widened since its creation and now seeks to be more balanced. According to him, when founded, the *Landesmuseum* concentrated very much on demonstrating ancient origins in a remote past. "Today its curators prefer to stress the importance of a comprehensive collection that covers every epoch in our history from the Stone Age to the Present". He describes its mission as encyclopaedic in terms of Swiss culture, indeed, its "legal obligation was to collect and publicly exhibit objects that reflect the history of Swiss culture from its very beginnings down to the present day. This essentially encyclopaedic approach was established during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has been maintained ever since (Furger, 1998: 15).

However according to Laffontant Vallotton (2007: 205) despite these efforts three historical periods are clearly dominant in terms of the volume of their collections: the early modern period, prehistory and the early middle ages. The predominance of decorative arts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century may be explained by the development of an art historical line of interpretation from the 1870s onwards that considered that national Swiss art began to exist from the sixteenth century onwards and was not so much expressed in monuments of 'high art' but in the more modest artisan type creations such as stained glass, metalwork, ceramics, wood sculptures and wood-work in general. It was underlined that these more modest domestic arts illustrated the efforts of a free bourgeois population rather than representing an art commanded by aristocrats and powerful men of the cloth. So it is that these so called minor art forms became particularly important in the acquisition policy of the *Landesmuseum* in its founding years as the products of national artistic genius (Laffontant, 2007: 185). These have come to represent the main contingent of the National museum's collections. It is interesting to note that the *Landesmuseum* was not established in the spirit of the fine arts paradigm so strongly present in other early national museums in countries such as France, Belgium or the Netherlands that had been created at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As defined by Schärer (Lapaire, Schärer, 1984: 125): 'The Museum's purpose is to acquire only objects that were made in Switzerland or were demonstrably used in the territory of modern-day Switzerland. Thus, the collection includes objects, primarily archaeological finds, from ancient and early history, weapons and inventories from the former Zürich Armoury, flags, uniforms, gold and silver, pewter, ceramics and glass,

textiles, costumes, coins, seals, stained glass, sculptures, paintings and prints, furniture as well as complete interiors, clocks, musical instruments, toys, farming implements and antique tools.'

The museum has, in the last five years, undergone complete renovation and expansion (Furger; Sieber, 2008) in the context of which the authors of the project hoped to reconsider the museographical conception of a museum that they consider to be out of touch with contemporary Swiss society. The new project has sought to work reflexively with the narratives, constructed at the end of the nineteenth century and which need to be interpreted differently today: they can no longer be accepted for what they are but need to be shown in the context that established them. The organizers of the project eliminated the idea of preserving them integrally (or even in part) as they argued that such a project would transform it into a museum for the history of history and museums (Furger, 2000: 97). The objective of the new project has been to find a place for contemporary history that presents an open-ended, non-definitive narrative of the twentieth century, placing the Swiss nation in a new post-communist context of Europe. The has moved the museum away from its very definite applied arts orientation to a stronger historical line but also from a chronologically organized presentation towards a more thematic approach. The decorative arts that played a fundamental role in the creation of the museum found their place in the so-called 'Collections gallery', including furniture, costumes and armour. However, the core of the museum is now 'The History of Switzerland' gallery which takes the visitor from the earliest populations to present day by the means of four separate themes – the first is the history of early settlements and migration, the second is religious or spiritual history and political history and economic development are the third and fourth thematic orientation.

### **Swiss Alpine Museum**

For Kaeser (2004: 51), the lakes and the mountains held a similarly important and romanticised place in the Swiss imagination of a nation defined mainly through its territorial specificity (rather than through a linguistic or a religious community). The role of the mountain and a discourse related to its place in Swiss culture was developed by writers from the eighteenth century onwards, its pastures came to symbolize a place preserved from the upheavals of the modern era, a place of authenticity that could not be tamed despite the context of industrialisation and the development of an urban lifestyle related to rural exodus. A political national relationship to the mountains can be traced back to Alfred Escher's speech at the opening session of Parliament in 1850 in which he related the Alps to the notion of a 'high altar of freedom' (Jost, 1988: 19). It found civil expression in the creation of the Swiss Alpine Club in 1863.

The importance of the mountains as a place of Swiss identity was represented in the creation of the Swiss Alpine Museum (1905) that developed out of a private associative initiative in the Swiss Alpine Club section of Bern (in parallel to a similar initiative undertaken at the same time in Geneva). Since its creation it has benefited from continuous expansion and development, moving into a new building in 1934 and it was completely renovated in 1993. For the last four decades it has also received regular federal funding for its expansion and for the organization of temporary exhibitions.

Its creation and positive evolution are witness to the continuing important of the mountains as a cultural asset, and even as one of the iconic expressions of the Swiss state. In a sense, the museum feeds on the same nostalgic relationship to a rural past as the Open Air museum of

Ballenberg. The museum's discourse today seeks to contribute to the notion of sustainable development, heightening awareness of the mountain's fragile eco-system and the impact of human economic activities ([http://www.alpinesmuseum.ch/index.php?article\\_id=5&clang=2](http://www.alpinesmuseum.ch/index.php?article_id=5&clang=2)).

### **Ballenberg: a national representation of country life**

The Ballenberg open-air museum offers itself to the visitor as a place to 'experience the past' of 'Switzerland as it used to be' (Museum website, <http://www.ballenberg.ch/en/Welcome>, accessed 22 October 2010). Set in a beautiful mountain landscape, the museum is made up of 'more than one hundred century-old buildings from all over Switzerland, 250 farmyard animals, traditional, old-time gardens and fields, demonstrations of local crafts and many special events creating a vivid impression of rural life in days gone by. Ballenberg is indeed unique. These different architectures aim to demonstrate the cultural diversity in terms of construction and lifestyle in rural Switzerland, as stated by the museum's website again: "let it be said that there is no such thing as a typically Swiss farmhouse style. The fact that Switzerland is centrally located and thus influenced by different cultures, not only adds to the unique diversity of languages and life styles, but also leads to an impressive variety of building types."

The open-air museum at Ballenberg, opened in 1978, although not administratively a federally run museum, is supported financially by federal and cantonal authorities through the fund for the 'Swiss Open Air Museum'. However it certainly represents the expression of a desire to show a nationally representative picture of country life. Since the 1950s, the history of rurality as a strong component of Swiss culture has met with great resonance in terms of museum creation, as can be observed in the exceptional multiplication of *heimatmuseen* throughout its territory. Switzerland counted 12 museums of this type in 1900, about 50 in 1937 and over 200 in 1969 (Lapaire, Schärer, 1984: 26). Although not repositories of prestigious objects but of regional ethnology and culture, such museums provide moving evidence of a rural lifestyle that is rapidly disappearing. At Ballenberg, this widespread local nostalgia is given national amplitude. The importance and representative value of this theme can be traced back to the national fairs of 1896 and 1914, in both cases the Village Suisse (Geneva, 1896) and the *Dörfli* (Bern, 1914) became the aesthetic expressions of Swiss identity (Jost, 1988: 17). The principal was further developed in 1939 during the preparation of the *Landesausstellung* in Zurich that was to lead to the creation of two separate associative groups in the 1960s: the "*Aktion Bauernhausforschung*" and the "*Verein zur Schaffung eines Freilichtmuseums Ballenberg*". Again as had been the case for the *Landesmuseum*, the evolution of the project was hampered by a conflict concerning the actual location of the museum. A federal commission was set up to study the case for a range of sites, with strong support for the project also being formulated by the canton of Bern. Ballenberg ob Brienz was selected in 1968 from a choice of six possible locations (Rubli, 1995: 84).

Today the museum seeks to present an alternative kind of history from that of major political events based, as it states on its website, on "the biographies of kings, aristocrats and rich citizens or dealing with military campaigns and extraordinary events." It claims that up until recently "the life of the ordinary people was not regarded as a suitable subject." Its main intellectual objective is to promote the history of rural everyday life as social history, with a particular emphasis on the history of women.

### **Latenium of Neuchâtel: exploring a national myth**

Neuchâtel's Latenium opened its doors in 2001, in a new modernist building that was conceived of as a dialectical exchange between the museum's interiors and the immediate outside environment. The Latenium is a museum and an archaeological park, situated on the edge of the Neuchâtel Lake at the foot of the Jura mountains and facing the Alps (like the Ballenberg Open-Air museum it profits from this beautiful and suitable setting for the subject matter of the museum). Today it is Switzerland's largest archaeological museum. Its name is a direct reference to the La Tène civilization, a Celtic civilization that was present across Europe from 450 to 50 BC; the museum however, illustrates themes from prehistory to the Middle Ages in both a regional and European perspective. The first collections of the museum came from Neuchâtel's municipal Museum of Art and History. No longer capable of presenting to the public, they handed them over to the cantonal state in 1952 under the responsibility of which they were provisionally housed in a different building. However it was the important series of new discoveries made in the 1960s due to major public work programs that led to the idea for a new museum in 1979. Its principal source of financing for the museum is the canton of Neuchâtel, the project for a new museum was accepted after a cantonal vote of the population in 1996, allowing Neuchâtel to provide the 21,5 million euros necessary for the construction of the new museum.

Though resolutely regional in administrative terms, the themes and history of the collections related to the so called lakeside civilizations place the museum clearly in a context of the history of national discourses on Swiss origins as was illustrated in a 2008 exhibition held in the *Latenium* in collaboration with the National Museum in Zurich, 'The imagery of the *lacustre*, vision of an immersed civilization'. Organized by Marc-Antoine Kaeser (2004: 56-64), the current director of the *Latenium*, it retraced the role of these lakeside civilisations in the construction of Swiss national identity. Kaeser underlines the significance of the discovery of the *Lacustres* in the nineteenth century during the same period that saw the birth of the modern Swiss confederation. This civilization provided an ideal support for a discourse of national unity in the nineteenth century mainly because more recent historical periods were already representative and instrumentalized in the context of the religious and political divisions that threatened to destabilize the young nation. National unity could only be found in the far off past: whilst Early medieval times were often referred to as a strong reference for the birth of a national principal, Kaeser (2004: 58) remarks that with the development of critical historical method in the nineteenth century, stronger scrutiny of many of the national legends (William Tell, the pledge of the Three Switzerlands) made them less effective.

In its presentation, the museum, which is the largest archaeological museum in Switzerland, combines a modern high-tech approach to display that presents the latest status of archaeological research whilst incorporating a reflexive turn on the history of the discipline. It presents a discourse clearly outside of the national paradigm by situating its subject - the lakeside La Tène settlements – as regional – yet directly related to the larger cultural Celtic community in a European perspective – from Ireland to Turkey (<http://www.latenium.ch/#latenium1?id=1>).

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The Latanium in Neuchâtel

<http://www.latanium.ch/#latanium1?id=1>

Swiss Alpine Museum

[http://www.alpinesmuseum.ch/index.php?article\\_id=5&clang=2](http://www.alpinesmuseum.ch/index.php?article_id=5&clang=2)

## Annex table, Switzerland

Name	Initiated	Inaugurated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Style Location
<u>Group of museums officially defined as the "Swiss national museum"</u>							
Swiss National Museum, Schweizerischen Landesmuseum, Museo Nazionale Svizzero, Musée National Suisse	Discussion began in 1883, federal foundation act, 27 June 1890	1898	Swiss federal parliamentary act, built by the city of Zurich. SNM (Swiss national museum)	State	Medieval Religious Art, Religious History, National History, Prehistoric and Ancient Archaeology on National Ground	Swiss cultural history: "several thousand years of the creative cultural activity of Switzerland's inhabitants". (Zwingli room), weapons and armour, military history, regional arts and crafts, clothing.	Zurich, 19 <sup>th</sup> c. neo-gothic castle.
Schloss Wildegg	Donated to the state about 1900	1912	Formerly part of the SNM – since 2010, managed by the canton of Argovie	State/cantonal	House and garden to visit: hosts temporary history exhibitions organised by the SNM.	Interiors from the 16 <sup>th</sup> to 19 <sup>th</sup> .	Castle perched above the village or Wildegg.
Swiss Customs Museum Cantine di Gandria	Border post until 1921	1949 (nationalised in 1970)	Directly affiliated to the SNM	State	Installation on smuggling and border control: objects hidden in baggage.		Former border guard's outpost, south shore of Lake Lugano across from Gandria.
Guilde house «Zur Meisen» Zurich		1956	Directly affiliated to the SNM	State	National Craft and Artisanat	Collection of porcelain and faience of the 18th century, mainly produced in Zurich by Kilchberg-Schooren.	Housed in Zurich in a house from about 1750.
Museum Bäregasse		1976 (but closed in 2008)	Formerly affiliated to the SNM, today city of Zurich	State	Cultural History, Museum of Historic Rooms	Period rooms as interiors of the city of Zurich (1650-1840) using collections that were part of the Landesmuseum.	
Museum für Musikautomaten, Schweiz		1979		State	Cultural History	World's largest collection of mechanical musical machines,	Seewen

Forum Schweizer Geschichte Schwyz, Swiss National Museum	1991	1995	Directly affiliated to the SNM	State	National Cultural Heritage/Material Culture	National cultural history, object based and multi-media, illustrating everyday life of the Swiss confederates from 1300 to 1800.	Schwyz, Alpine region, housed in a former granary and arsenal.
Château de Prangins: Swiss National Museum	Donation 1975, rehabilitation	1998	Donation of the cantons of Vaud and Geneva to the Suisse Confederation	State	National Political and Economical History, 18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> c.		Prangins, above Lake Geneva, château dating from 1730.
<u>Museums whose principal source of finance is federal or that receive regular funding</u>							
Graphische Sammlung der Eidgenössischen Technischen Hochschule (Print collection of the Swiss federal Institute of Technology)		1867	State owned and funded by OFC, Federal Office of Culture		Art	Very important collection of prints. Italian Renaissance, but also German and Dutch artist. Swiss prints (15.-20 c.).	Zurich
Museo Vincenzo Vela	1895 (donation by the artist)	1898	State owned and funded by OFC, Federal Office of Culture		Art	Sculpture collection of the work of Vincenzo Vela (1820-1891) and Lorenzo Vela. And by the painter Spartaco Vela. (fonds d'atelier de Vincenzo).	Lignoretto
Schweizerisches Alpines museum	1905	1934 (current building)	Regular federal funding. Dept of Environment, Transport, Energy	Municipal	History, Geology, Cartography, Alpinism	Alpine region	Bern

Klostermuseum St. Georgen	1929		Owned by the Gottfried Keller foundation and funded by OFC, Federal Office of Culture		Cultural and Religious History and Art	The Benedictine Abbey of Saint Georgen is one of the most important historical monuments from the late middle ages and early Renaissance in Switzerland.	Stein am Rhein
Swiss theater museum		1944	Regular federal funding. From the OFC, Federal Office of Culture		Cultural History	Theater history from the Greeks, Shakespeare, up until the present day. Architectural models of theater constructions.	Bern
Oskar Reinhart collection	1951 (donation)		State owned and funded by OFC, Federal Office of Culture	Donated to the city of Winterthur	Art	Collection of considerable importance, Swiss, German and Austrian artists of the 18 <sup>th</sup> to the 10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Winterthur
Verkehrshaus der Schweiz, transport museum		1959	Regular federal funding. Dept of foreign affairs		Museum of Transport History	Airplanes, cars...	Lucerne
Swiss science center Technorama		1982	Regular federal funding. Dept of interior. State Secretary for Education and Research		Science and Technology Museum	Over 500 interactive displays investigating physical sciences. Also the largest collection of toy trains in the world.	Winterthur
Musée international de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant Rouge		1988	Regular federal funding. Dept of interior		Political/ Military History	Iconographic collection illustrating the history of the Red-Cross, collection of objects belonging to prisoners. Family archives...	Geneva
Fotostiftung Schweiz		2003	Regular federal funding. From the OFC Federal Office of Culture		Art	Swiss photography from 1840 to present day. Collection of classics of international photography.	

<u>Major municipal museums of national importance</u>							
Kunstmuseum Basel	Collections go back to 16th century; 1849, first important building and full public access	1936 current building		Municipal	Art	European old masters collection of importance.	
Historische Museum Bern/Einstein Museum	1840, opening to the public of a history collection based on the town treasure, 1881, founding of the Historical Museum	1894, opening in current building		Municipal	History, Archaeology, Ethnography, Numismatics, Coupled with a Biographical Museum dedicated to the life and work of Albert Einstein (since 1979)	A more universal collection compared with Zurich's historical collections, besides archaeological collections going back to prehistoric times of the Bern region, and large cultural history collection: arms uniforms, flags but also decorative arts. Universal coin collection, small greco-roman antiques collection. Ethnographic collections representing all the continents.	Constructed in Bern in 1894 in the historicist style of Swiss 15th and 16th century castles.
Geneva, Museum of Art and History	The fine arts museum opened in 1826. But decision to unite different types of museums in Geneva in one central institution under one roof = 1900.	1910, (present building)		Municipal	Archaeology, Art and Applied arts	Regional and European prehistory, oriental and greco-roman antiquity; European old masters... Swiss art of the 19 <sup>th</sup> and 20 <sup>th</sup> c. One of the most universal collections in Switzerland.	
Ethnographical Museum of Neuchâtel	1795	1904	Coupled with the University of Neuchâtel Ethnography Institut	Municipal	Ethnography	Universal collection representing all the continents with a department dedicated to European folklore or popular art.	Neuchâtel

Kunsthaus Zürich	Art Exhibits began in 1799, by the Zürich Art Assoc. And it is a permanent public museum since 1847.	1910 (present building)	Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft	Associative	Fine arts	Flemish masters. Representative of collection of 19th century swiss painting. Wide ranging collection of swiss prints. French and Swiss sculpture. Notably the largest collection of Giacometti. (Until 1920 it had collected only Swiss art).	Heimplatz, the current building dates to 1907-1910.
Neuchâtel: Latanium, park and archaeological museum	1979	2001	Canton of Neuchâtel	Cantonal	Archaeology, Préhistoire	Region of Neuchâtel and Môtiers, some of the most important prehistoric collections in Switzerland.	On the shore of the lake of Neuchâtel.
<u>Museums titled as "Swiss" or whose collections have specific national resonance</u>							
Schloss Landshut, Schwiezer museum für Wild und Jagd		1968		Municipal	Country Life, Culture		Utzensdorf in the canton of Bern.
Swiss Open-Air Museum, Ballenberg	1939	1978	Supported financially by federal and cantonal authorities through the Fund for the "Swiss Open Air Museum"	Private run by a foundation	Country Architecture, Country Life, Cultural History	Living culture and customs of Switzerland in all styles and materials representing all the regions and different craft techniques. 80 homes and farm buildings rebuilt and restored.	Town of Ballenberg in the Canton of Bern.
Birthouse of Huldrych Zwingli		1910			Biographical Museum, Religious History	Period rooms, collection of bibles	House where the reformer Zwingli was born in 1484, in the town of Wildhaus.
Museum of Swiss citizens abroad (Musée des Suisses dans le Monde)		1964			Political, Military, Economic, Diplomatic, Litterary History	History of Swiss citizen's achievements abroad.	In the castle of Penthes, canton of Geneva.

Swiss Jewish Museum		1966	Association for the Jewish museum of Switzerland	Associative	Cultural History	Art and cult objects of jewish culture	Basel
Musée d'Horlogerie du Locle		1959			Material Culture, Industry	Set in the home of an 18 <sup>th</sup> century watchmaker, collections of watches, clocks, automates etc.	Locle in the Canton of Neuchâtel.
Musée de l'alimentation/Alimentarium		1985 (renovated in 2002)		Nestlé funded, Alimentarium foundation	Cultural History of Food	A permanent interdisciplinary display looks at the realm of food from the point of view of history, ethnology and science.	Vevey (Suisse), housed in the first administrative headquarters of the Nestlé company.