

«WITZERLAND» A GUIDE TO SWISS HUMOUR

2nd April – 13th September 2009

Special exhibition in the Swiss National Museum, Zurich

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WITZERLAND

What do we Swiss laugh at? What do people laugh at us about? The special exhibition in the Swiss National Museum «WITZERLAND» investigates these and other questions. Humour, jokes and satire are the subject matter of the show: a multimedia compilation of views of Switzerland as seen by humourists. Jokes and humour may be aggressive, wicked, harmless, daring, political or suggestive. They are mundane but seldom banal.

In the radio and film excerpts specially compiled for «WITZERLAND» we can follow in an entertaining manner the way in which the subject matter and understanding of situation comedy have changed or have remained the same – an amusing look at the history of mental attitudes in our country in words and pictures.

Friedrich Dürrenmatt's wicked drawings in his 1963 book «Die Heimat im Plakat» (The homeland in posters) show how vicious caricature can be. One could almost take him to be a precursor of the «Punk and movement graphics», represented in the exhibition with a selection of works, which suddenly appeared about 30 years ago and quickly disappeared again.

Children's jokes, rhymes and verses are a further important component of this many-faceted exhibition. In an audio installation visitors can hear children's first efforts at irony and situation comedy. In addition, «WITZERLAND» looks at the different understanding of humour by men and women. Many politically and socially incorrect jokes can also be found in the exhibition.



In the field of political caricature the «Nebelspalter», a classic among satirical periodicals, displays remarkable consistency. Since its creation in 1875, it has influenced many generations in their understanding of humour and also of politics. For the exhibition, the editors of the «Nebelspalter» and the National Museum invited well-known cartoonists to give their views of a contradictory Switzerland which still sees itself as a «chosen country» or an «island».

Humour, satire and jokes are phenomena that cannot really be displayed in a museum. Jokes are a product of the vernacular, and they are always being recreated, just as the language itself is constantly changing. Normally, museums collect cultural assets, tangible objects which they show in their exhibitions. To exhibit jokes in a museum should therefore not surprise us, since humour, satire and jokes are also cultural assets. A joke is indeed a cultural asset, but of a non-material nature, similar to traditions, turns of phrase and rituals.

Supporting programme

A varied supporting programme is available for «WITZERLAND», including lectures, talks, workshops and conducted tours for children and groups.

Publication to accompany the exhibition

The publication «WITZERLAND» is available at the Museum shop, or can be ordered from:
buchbestellung@slm.admin.ch

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday 10 am to 5 pm, Thursday 10 am to 7 pm, open on holidays.

www.witzerland.ch

The website contains further information about the exhibition and the supporting programme

All the media texts and a selection of pictures are available for downloading on the home page

www.witzerland.ch under “Press”

Partners

The exhibition was created in cooperation with Nebelspalter and Swiss Radio DRS 1.

Other media partners of the exhibition are: Blick am Abend, Nebelspalter, Energy Zürich, Tele Top.

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