

**«WITZERLAND» A GUIDE TO SWISS HUMOUR**

2nd April – 13th September 2009

Special exhibition in the Swiss National Museum, Zurich

## TOUR THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Jokes and humour are volatile elements – the exhibition «WITZERLAND» tries to pin them down, and by means of highlights sketches a short history of humour in Switzerland.

### Political caricature and cartoon

A major section of the exhibition is devoted to political satire; large scale prints show caricatures which appeared in the satirical periodical «Nebelspalter» from the 19th century up to the 1970's. How cartoonists today view the contradictions of Switzerland becomes apparent in the many drawings that were sent in after an appeal by the Swiss National Museum and the «Nebelspalter».

Friedrich Dürrenmatt is famous for his harsh criticism of Switzerland, but his drawings are less well known. «WITZERLAND» exhibits reproductions from his 1963 book «Die Heimat im Plakat» (The homeland in posters). Their expressions show a relationship to the documents from the early 1980's, also on show; the time of the «Bewegig» (Movement), a satirical period of about two years, left as a legacy a large number of periodicals («Fanzines»), posters and handbills extolling absurdity and black humour as freedom.

A showcase provides room for the original drawings of the West Swiss caricaturist Martial Leiter. «WITZERLAND» also shows the work of ZEP, creator of the internationally well-known figure «Titeuf». The Iranian illustrator Parsua Bashi, who lives in Zürich, and wrote the comic book «Nylon Road», presents her view of Switzerland and western culture in a wall decoration specially created for the exhibition.

### Film, radio and television

At various points throughout the exhibition the visitors can sit in «multi-media seats» to see and hear all sorts of material from the history of films and radio. Based on excerpts from about 50 Swiss films from the 1930's onwards, from Clown Grock to Alfred Rasser, Walter Roderer and even to the «Herbstzeitlosen» and «Achtung fertig Charlie!», it is possible to see how the subject matter and the understanding of situation comedy have changed or remained the same.

Together with the roughly 50 excerpts from the archives of Swiss Radio DRS, a unique picture is created of Swiss mental attitudes, in word and picture.

Since the 1960's television has competed increasingly with radio. The «Fernsehstube» (TV room) of the exhibition shows what amused the Swiss television public during the 1970's to 1990's.

### **Jokes have no morality**

Jokes make it possible to speak openly about taboo subjects. In children's rhymes and verses, for instance, no holds are barred, so that adults may even blush with embarrassment when they hear them. In an audio installation visitors can hear children's first efforts at irony and situation comedy. «WITZERLAND» also looks at the different understanding of humour by men and women. The exhibition investigates the laws of humour in relation to the sexes.

### **How the Swiss see themselves**

A citizen of Basle is not from Zurich, not from Freiburg and not from Berne. As long ago as the 18th century jokes were made about various parts of the Confederation and their inhabitants. The stereotypes were not so very different from those of today. Marie-Thérèse Porchet's sketch takes a contemporary look from west to east, across the language frontier.

### **Laughing at Switzerland**

The pictures that countries and peoples have of each other are often full of preconceived ideas. What jokes or funny ideas do we find abroad about Switzerland? «WITZERLAND» shows a selection of the infinite number of conceptions of our country.