

Expo.02 : "Nothing is more essential than a celebration"

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Nelly Wenger, President of the Expo General Directorate:

"Nothing is more essential than a celebration"



Michael Stahl


The monolith designed by Parisian architect Jean Nouvel appears to have been standing guard over them since time immemorial. A strange, rusty, floating mausoleum, the monolith can be reached by boat and offers visitors three splendid panoramas: the surrounding landscape, the panorama of the historic battle of Murten, and present-day Switzerland.

The mobile arteplage of the Jura (MAJ) is the most imaginative and unpredictable of all the arteplages. This converted former gravel barge crosses from shore to shore, constantly changing. Even the events and exhibitions on board the arteplage are difficult to categorise. Following the principle of freedom, the MAJ goes its own way.

The Fifth Switzerland

In its message to parliament in 1999 the Federal Council expressly devoted Expo.02 to the Fifth Switzerland as well. The national exhibition should not only be an enriching experience for our people at home, but also have meaning for Swiss Abroad and raise awareness of the characteristics of our country among other nationalities, too (see also Interview with Nelly Wenger).

Swiss Abroad Day will be held as part of the Cantonal Days at Expo.02, under the motto "Images Suisses". The Organisation for the Swiss Abroad has designated this special festive occasion on 10 August as the highlight of this year's congress (see box).

Since the outset, the organisers of Expo.02 have included the Fifth Switzerland in their plans. For instance, six catamarans to be used as ferries during the national exhibition are to be called after consular regions where the largest number of Swiss Abroad are domiciled. Two were already christened at the end of last year and bear the names "Lyon" and "New York". 

INTERNET

www.aso.ch
www.expo.02.ch
www.artcanal.ch
www.chateau-de-penthes.ch

Gabrielle Keller: Ms Wenger, what is the aim of Expo.02?

Nelly Wenger: Expo.02 is an event where we can take a close look at the complex Swiss identity which is not always immediately discernible.

Are national exhibitions peculiar to Switzerland?

Absolutely. We have presented our project abroad and noticed that people have to know our country well in order to fully

understand the word "national". In Switzerland, to understand the word "national" means first and foremost overcoming the cantonal and community mindset. Abroad the word "national" is perceived as something narrower, a means of insulation. Expo.02 also presents a collective identity which the Swiss sometimes lose sight of.

Did you visit Expo 1964 in Lausanne?

No, because at the time I was a 9-year old

The Fifth Switzerland at Expo.02

This year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad has chosen Expo.02 as its backdrop. The congress will be held in Berne and Bienne from 9 to 11 August and will be officially opened on the Friday evening in Berne. The highlight will be Swiss Abroad Day on the Saturday, on the Bienne arteplage, when the OSA will be presenting the diversity of the Fifth Switzerland and its close ties with the home country under the motto "Images Suisses – la Cinquième Suisse en mouvement et solidaire".

Swiss Abroad Day

Various art installations have been set up in conjunction with Swiss at home and abroad. They can be admired, touched and experienced at various locations around the Bienne site.

In the morning a panel discussion on relationships with the homeland will be held on the main stage of the arteplage, featuring five prominent Swiss Abroad and two residents of Switzerland, and moderated by Filippo Leutenegger, CEO of Jean Frey AG and former editor-in-chief of SF DRS.

Various attractions await the public on the Scène du Rivage, also on the Bienne arteplage. These include a choir of young Swiss Abroad, Los Angeles-based dancer Lisa K. Lock from Basle, and the orchestra of the papal Swiss guard.

In the evening we open a window on the world. As with every year, a member of the Federal Council will address congress participants. Following a few artistic performances there will be a concert consisting of a mixture of foreign and Swiss sounds.

This unforgettable day closes with a night-time spectacle on the lake.

A detailed programme will be sent to you once your application has been received (page 7). gk

This day has been organised thanks to the support of swissinfo/SRI, the Association for the Promotion of Swiss Abroad Organisations, official Swiss representations, the EDA/Service for the Swiss Abroad, the "Institut des Suisses dans le Monde", Expo.02 and Unilever.

in Casablanca, Morocco, where I was born. However my husband experienced it as a 14-year-old. But people have told me so much about Expo 64 that I now have the unsettling feeling that I was actually there.

How much will Expo.02 cost us in all?

We have a budget of CHF 1.4 billion and a deficit guarantee of CHF 478 million from the government. Now the National Council has approved an additional credit of CHF 120 million.

Many critics say that this money could have been put to better use. What do you say to this?

My answer is on two levels. Everyone has the right to set their own priorities when it comes to money, but I believe it is wrong to regard something as superfluous only because it is a celebration. Nothing is more essential than a celebration. In poor countries (and here many Swiss Abroad will agree with me), people know how to celebrate. Switzerland is not a poor country. I would find it sad if Switzerland were unable to afford a major celebration once in a generation.

The motto for the Swiss Abroad Day is "Images Suisses". What are your images of Switzerland?

Firstly I find the idea of using the plural very strong, because the most dominant element in Switzerland is diversity. If you were to ask me whether people of a more conservative nature would also recognise themselves in Expo.02, I would reply that everyone should be able to recognise some aspect of themselves there.

And your personal "take" on Switzerland?

It is the complexity of the country that never fails to impress me: the direct juxtaposition of contrasts. Anxiety and generosity, large and small. I also like the way the Swiss are close to the soil: this down-to-earthness that has protected us on several occasions. On the other hand I have problems accepting the aversion to philosophical, visionary discussion. People have little time for enthusiasm. The Swiss are pragmatic. And that is often an obstacle.


What does the Fifth Switzerland mean to you?

The Fifth Switzerland is of absolutely vital importance because it constitutes part of

our country. It is essential for a country to have antennae and be anchored throughout the world. The exchange of ideas between our country and the Fifth Switzerland is also of major importance; Swiss Abroad bring a breath of fresh air to us.

I myself was a Swiss Abroad when I was living in Cameroon. I met a great many extraordinary Swiss out there. The Fifth Switzerland adds a dimension of inordinate value to our country.

What is your message to Swiss Abroad?

Every Swiss Abroad who feels it is worth travelling to Switzerland to visit Expo.02, honours us. For Swiss Abroad Expo is the place where they can put to the test their everyday preconceptions and enter a visionary world. Expo.02 is a synthesis of deep-rooted tradition and openness. The number of visitors from the Fifth Switzerland is an important barometer for the success of our national exhibition. 

Translated from the German by N. Chisholm

A galaxy of surprises

The events planned by Expo.02 contain a galaxy of surprises, emotions, reveries, charm and laughter: around 1500 stage and entertainment projects, more than 10,000 performances, 20,000 enthusiastic artists, sportsmen and women, and twenty show venues distributed around the Expo.02 arteplages.

Aimed at the widest possible audience, the programme of events also reveals a hint of audacity by involving lesser-known artists as well as prominent personalities. Needless to say the programmes feature some big names in the entertainment world, such as Gardi Hutter, Compay Segundo and Mummenschanz, but the bulk of events is down to hundreds of artists and cultural institutions who do not necessarily enjoy widespread fame.

For all their diversity, the events have one thing in common: an encounter between generations, artistic disciplines, linguistic regions, tradition and modernity. The aim is collaborate with artists in finding new ways of stretching the public's horizons and captivating visitors. The offerings of Expo.02 illustrate this desire to build bridges. The opening ceremony master-minded by François Rochaix is a perfect example of this concept. It will be held simultaneously on the four arteplages of Expo.02 and on the floating Jura arteplage, and directly broadcast throughout the country by Swiss television.

The event programmers are doing everything possible to meet a major challenge: to live up to the public's expectations of Expo.02. The threefold formula for success is: innovation, surprise and captivation. **Expo.02 PR**

Translated from the German by N. Chisholm

Cost of admission to Expo.02

(All prices in Swiss francs, per person (adult), incl. VAT)

Ticket	15 May to 20 October 2002
1-day-pass	48.-
3-day-pass	120.-
Season pass	240.-
Evening pass	10.-

Reduction:

Children under age 6	Free
Children aged 6 to 16	50%
Children with SBB Junior Pass or an SBB General Pass, accompanied by a parent	up to age 16 free
Senior citizens, students, apprentices	10%

All Expo.02 passes are valid on all arteplages and for any date (except 1 August and the closing day, 20 October).

The tickets are available from any rail station in Switzerland or Tel ++41 (0) 900 02 02 02 (tickets, general information, accommodation)