

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 29 (2002)
Heft: 4

Artikel: Reactions abroad : the National Exhibition as seen by the foreign press
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906583>

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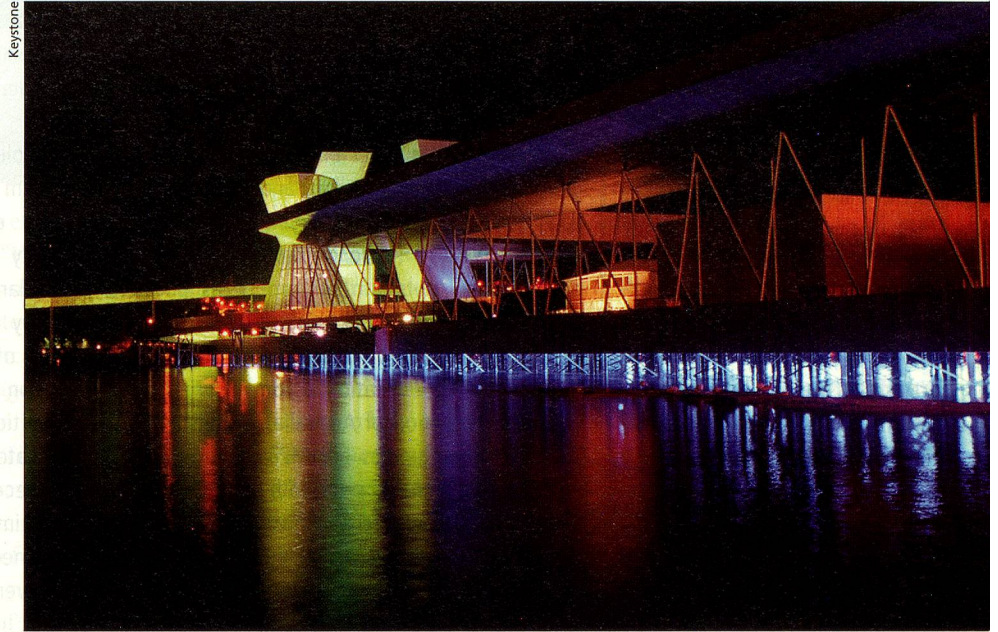
The National Exhibition as seen by the foreign press

Following some serious criticism in the run-up phase, Switzerland's Expo.02 has been described in more favourable terms since it opened. A look at international reports on Expo shows that the national exhibition may also change the image of our country abroad.

NEITHER NEUTRAL NOR SMALL, but gigantic and chaotic. In other words, completely un-Swiss. This is how the astonished correspondent of the Bangkok "Nation", described Expo 02. Nor is she alone in her opinion. Countless foreign press reports express surprise and pleasure at an Expo which does not fit their image of Switzerland. "Discover another Switzerland," headlines Dijon's "Le Bien Quotidien", and Le Figaro alludes to the slogan of the Swiss pavilion at the World Expo in Seville in 1992: "La Suisse anticonformiste existe." The "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" sees Expo as a "reflection of Switzerland and modern life", while the "Financial Times" warns its readers that cows, chocolate and watches are virtually absent from the Expo. Instead, it continues, the exhibition is "futuristic, daring, surprising". Even, it admits bemusedly, "sensual".

Celebration or a search for the self?

While the French press primarily focuses on detailed descriptions of the individual exhibitions and services in order to assist readers planning to visit the three-lakes region, the German-speaking press is dominated by feature columns on the Expo phenomenon. It is "a sceptical and simultaneously humorous look at its own self", raves the Hamburg "Zeit": "major event with depth". In the exhibitions (including the „hamlet of Murten"), Switzerland is "searching for itself". The




Magical artepilage: Bienne.

"Welt am Sonntag" is less flattering: Under the headline "Switzerland celebrates itself", it declares that the purpose of Expo is "to show the world how great the alpine republic is". And, while the "Süddeutsche Zeitung" critic was very taken with the landscape and setting, he found the „endlessly repeated performances" in the exhibitions largely superfluous. Jean Nouvel's monolith and the artificial cloud in Yverdon were the only things he enthused over, describing the latter as "a surreal sensation between heaven and earth"; it was a "unique spectacle for the senses (...) to enter the damp steam".

The monolith: a landmark

Other writers are largely unanimous in acclaiming the monolith and cloud as the main attractions at Expo. "Le Bien Public" compares Jean Nouvel's floating cube to the Eiffel Tower. Like the tower, originally designed to be a temporary construction, the monolith could become a Swiss landmark. Even the journalist writing for Austria's "Standard", who visited Expo in the company of Geneva professor of sociology Jean Ziegler and paints a critical picture, enthuses over the "rusty mausoleum". The

"Standard", along with many other newspapers, also provides an insight into the long and difficult process leading up to the Expo. The "Frankfurter Allgemeine" attributes the problems in the run-up stage to the lack of central structures in Switzerland, and L'Evènementiel talks of "financial and philosophical problems". The fact that Expo has been realised despite all this, says the article insightfully, is thanks to artistic director Martin Heller and general director Nelly Wenger (or "Super-Nelly", as the "Financial Times" refers to her, throwing characteristic British reserve to the wind). Amidst this flood of information, criticism and praise it is refreshing to find a short, objective analysis. For this reason the "South Wales Echo" deserves mention. In a small article next to two large-format pictures of the cloud in Yverdon and a cuckoo clock, it writes: "Remember: Expo is not Euro-Disney. But if you like stimulating holidays and your children are the type who want to learn something, Expo is a rewarding experience." luc. 

This article appeared on 8 June 2002 in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung".

Translated from the German.