

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 36 (2009)
Heft: 3

Artikel: Exhibition at the National Museum : "Witzerland" - the humorous side of Switzerland
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906378>

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“Witzerland” – the humorous side of Switzerland

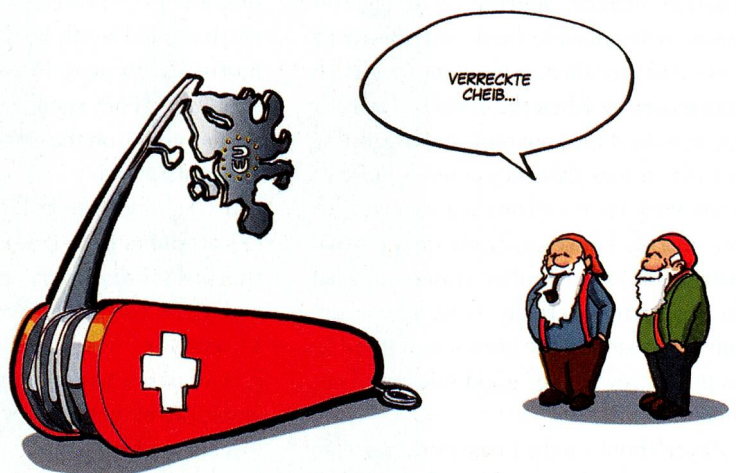
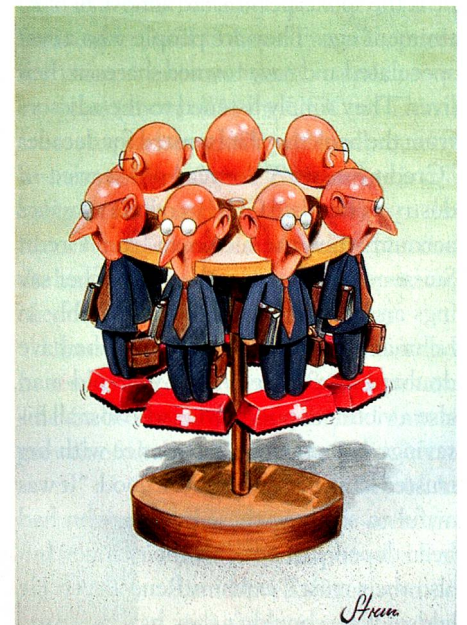
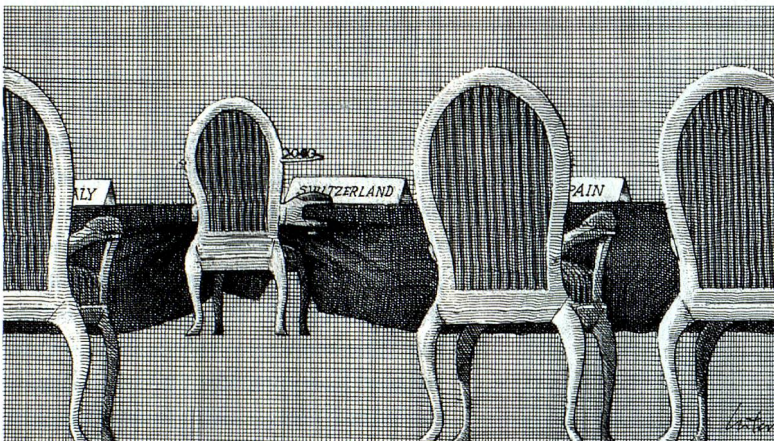
Do the Swiss have a sense of humour and, if so, what kind? An exhibition at the Swiss National Museum in Zurich shows there is a very funny side to Switzerland and that Swiss humour can often be quite cutting. Young and old visitors alike will find this multimedia exhibition amusing and enlightening. By Heinz Eckert

When the exhibition was being planned, organisers asked themselves whether there was such a thing as “Swiss” humour, ex-

plains the curator, Walter Keller, in the programme for the exhibition which opened its doors on 2 April and will run until 13

September 2009. The diversity of this special “Witzerland” exhibition at the National Museum is highlighted by the fact that politically incorrect and even dirty jokes are featured.

The main part of the exhibition is dedicated to political satire, with the glorious past of the Swiss satirical magazine “Der Nebelspalter” as the main attraction. Caricatures from the magazine from the 19th century to the 1970s are displayed in large-format print. It is interesting to see that the main themes highlight practically the same issues both then and now, including Switzerland’s relationship with other countries



“Well, I never!”

and with itself, opening up to the world and to Europe, and isolation in the hedgehog position.

How cartoonists see political life in Switzerland today is revealed by the vast number of drawings sent in for the exhibition following an appeal by the Swiss National Museum and the "Nebelspalter".

The political drawings from French-speaking Switzerland poke fun at the same things as their colleagues in German-speaking Switzerland. However, the border with German-speaking Switzerland and the relationship between French-speaking and German-speaking Swiss play a big role in

political satire in French-speaking Switzerland. The only criticism that can be levelled at the "Witzerland" exhibition at the National Museum is that the satirists from French-speaking Switzerland and Ticino are treated shabbily, and great political caricaturists, such as Chapatte and Burki, are not represented with a single illustration.

French-speaking Switzerland is unfortunately also marginalised in the audio-visual section, and Ticino is not represented at all. Nevertheless, Marie-Thérès Porchet, French-speaking Switzerland's answer to Emil, does feature. On the other hand, au-

dio and visual displays from German-speaking Switzerland can be enjoyed. These range from Niklaus Meienberg to Kliby and evoke plenty of memories from yesterday.

This special exhibition at the Swiss National Museum in Zurich runs until 13 September 2009. More information is available at www.witzerland.ch

