



Museum of Art

Sion

Place de la Majorie
Sion Valais
www.musees-valais.ch
11:00 - 17:00, except Mondays

VALAIS ART MUSEUM, SION



One museum, two castles

Located at the heart of the Swiss Alps, the Museum presents a collection of art from the 18th century to the present with emphasis on the Valais in particular and on mountains in general. It displays regional works of surprising quality as well as major works of international contemporary art. Created by the State of the Valais in 1947 as a reference institution for art (regional heritage, retrospectives, special exhibitions, contemporary art, scientific research), it is one of the youngest art museums in Switzerland.

The Museum is housed in the castles of the Vidomnat and the Majorie, monuments which left their mark on the exceptional history and landscape of Sion. From this vantage point, visitors



can enjoy superb views of the Old Town, the vineyards and the surrounding mountains.

The castles are believed to have been built in the 12th to 13th centuries and were named after the Episcopal officials – called «vidômne» and «major» – who resided there. At the end of the 14th century, the Majorie Castle was acquired by the Bishop of Sion and Count of the Valais. It remained an Episcopal residence for four centuries, and therefore the centre of spiritual and worldly power.

The present appearance of the buildings is the result of many alterations and much remodelling. Part of the Majorie burned down in 1788. The main tower and its great reception halls were untouched, and so their early-16th century

decoration has been preserved intact. As for the Vidomnat, it was completely gutted and renovated in the twentieth century.

The collection on display is intended as a dialogue between history, architecture and nature. The presentation of the works is also attuned to the life of the institution: temporary exhibitions, loans, acquisitions and generous gifts regularly renew the artistic ambience in the Museum's galleries.



The Bequest of the painter Raphy Dallèves marked the inception of the Museum.



The presentation of the collection creates dialogues the works: here, a sculpture by Pierre-Alain Zuber, a photograph by Thomas Flechtner and a painting by Alois Lichtsteiner.

room 1

The alpine sublime

The first room links the Museum from the start with the image of the Alps as it was «invented» during the 18th century and elaborated during the 19th. Paintings by the pioneer alpine painter Caspar Wolf alternate with those of the romantic painters from Geneva, François Diday and Charles Guigon. The works express the artists' fascination as they progressively explored remote places that had been feared and avoided before.



*Caspar Wolf,
The Bridge and Gorges of
La Dala at Loèche,
around 1775,
oil on canvas, 82 x 54 cm.*

The taming of the mountain world by painters starting in the middle of the 18th century was part of a broad scientific and cultural movement that brought with it a new interest in this sort of landscape. The encyclopaedic curiosity of the Enlightenment was paralleled by a new – pre-Romantic – sensitivity for nature, as expressed in the

writings of such seminal figures as Albert de Haller and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The mountain became the paradigmatic locus of the sublime, an aesthetic category that qualified man's fascination with natural phenomena in a blend of awe and pleasure, drama and beauty, power and fragility. Thunderstorms, floods and avalanches became favourite subjects for the painters. Chiaroscuro effects, stunning vistas and masses of cloud or mist were among the dramatic effects precisely staged in the studio by painters to move the spectator and facilitate his identification with the tiny figures that inhabited their pictures. Through works often enhanced by allegorical and moral dimensions, the landscape genre sought to come into its own and be accepted on the same terms as history painting.

François Diday, Trail to the Grimsel Pass at Handeck, 1855, oil on canvas, 76 x 93 cm.



rooms 2 to 5

The invention of the traditional Valais

Already at the end of the 19th century, the perception of the Valais as a repository of rural life and traditions had begun to gain currency and was progressively reinforced. This image was the creation of novelists (Mario, Louis Courthion, C.F. Ramuz), as well as of the painters of genre scenes and landscapes.

The theme of the mountain peasant was invented in the 1860s by Raphael Ritz, an artist from the Valais who established himself in Düsseldorf and worked for a wealthy urban clientele. His large figure compositions combine the regional picturesque (traditional



Raphael Ritz, Pilgrimage to Longeborgne, 1868, oil on canvas, 100 x 89 cm.

costumes of the Valais, popular piety, mountain scenery) with messages of universal import (Ages of Life, Temple of Nature).

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, Valais regionalism thrived, in particular through the image of peasant life created by painters of the School of Savièse, the name given to an artists' colony that established itself in this village and worked in a vein similar to the Pont-Aven group in France



Marguerite Burnat-Provins, Young Girl from Savièse, 1900, pencil, charcoal, pastel, watercolour and gouache on paper, 37 x 54 cm.

Ernest Biéler, Mother and Child, 1907, gouache, watercolour and pencil on paper, 69 x 90 cm.



and the Worpswede colony in Germany. Viewed in a larger context, the School of Savièse was part of a widespread phenomenon involving the cultural appropriation of the image of the Valais by artists. Among them were Ernest Biéler, Raphy Dallèves, Marguerite Burnat-Provins, Edmond Bille and Edouard Vallet, who painted in a number of villages of the central Valais (Hérévence, Savièse, Ayent, Chandolin, Vercorin). Their works combine a sort of rural exoticism and national picturesque in which the Valais appears as the repository of a world that has remained faithful to its folkloric traditions and crafts, attached to institutions (patriarchy, religion, community) and living in symbiosis with Nature (agriculture, life rhythms).



*Edmond Bille, The First Spring, 1907,
oil on cardboard, 54 x 82 cm.*

The vision of the Valais presented by these artists is selective, aestheticized and primitivistic. It derives from a typically urban perception tailored to a bourgeois public who sought in it the cultural and ideological antidotes to the rampant social and economic modernism of the times (industrialization, urbanization,



Edouard Vallet, The Earth, 1917, oil on canvas, 53 x 81 cm.

feminism, socialism).

The School of Savièse is above all a cultural phenomenon that attracted artists of very different stylistic tendencies. Where Biéler and Dallèves adapted the cosmopolitanism of Modern Style to a repertoire of regional imagery, Bille and Vallet strove to create a synthesis of artistic modernity that used the resources of naturalism, divisionism and expressionism.



Oskar Kokoschka, Vineyard near Sion, 1947, oil on canvas, 65 x 100 cm.

rooms 6 to 10

The call of abstraction

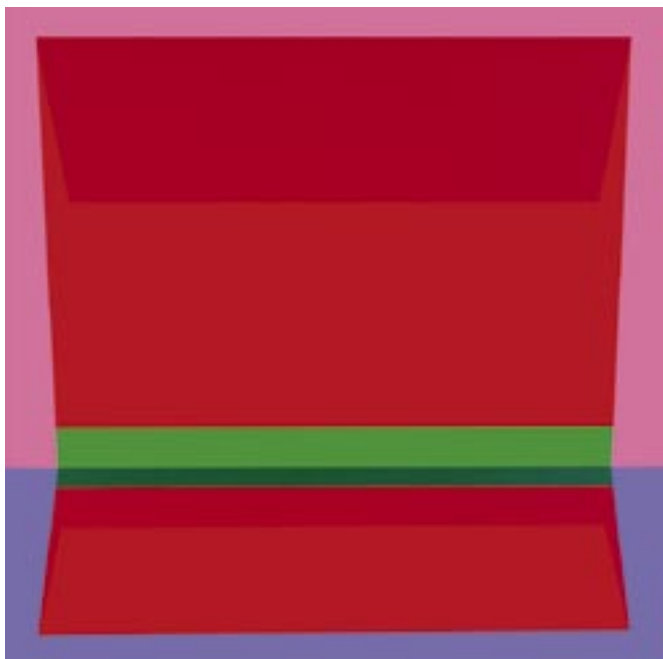
The internationalisation of cultural exchanges that came in the wake of the Second World War integrated the Valais into a network that included avant-gardes in the most remote regions. Artists from the outside settled permanently in the Valais (Angel Duarte, Paul-André Zeller, André Gigon, Gottfried Tritten), while Valais artists who had moved to urban centres keep in touch



*Charles Rollier, Emanation, 1961,
oil on paper on canvas, 150 x 100 cm.*



*Equipo 57, Development Nr. 1, 1961-62,
oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm.*



Gustave Cerutti, Untitled, 1974, oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.



Fernand Dubuis, Bright Blue, Violet, Mixed White, around 1968, oil on canvas, 81 x 100 cm.

with the regional institutions (Fernand Dubuis, Suzanne Auber).

Most of these artists hearkened to the call of abstraction. Then considered to be the culmination of modern art, abstraction durably marked their aesthetic orientation. The choice of modalities was wide, ranging from the pure formal experiments of geometric abstraction to the subjectivity of expressive abstractions, via the full spectrum of visual transpositions of the landscape, music, the psyche and spirituality.

The simple landscapes of Leo Andenmatten brought him to the limits of abstraction and monochromatic painting. The group Equipo 57, of which Ángel Duarte, a Valaisan by adoption, was a founding member, explores non-Euclidean space in a parascientific spirit. Gustave Cerutti push the stridences of colour and geometry to their extremes. Fernand Dubuis struc-

tures his paintings with interactive coloured masses. The graphic gesturality of Charles Rollier expresses a quest for the primal forces of the body and mind. The expressionistic voice of Gottfried Tritten questions the power of the sign, matter and colour. The wildly exuberant paintings of Suzanne Auber contain liberating virtues.



*Gottfried Tritten, The Valais, 1958-60,
oil on canvas, 130 x 200 cm.*



*Suzanne Auber, Take off that Uniform, it Looks Old-Fashioned,
1994, acrylic and pastels on paper and canvas, 146 x 322 cm.*

rooms 11 to 17

A castle for contemporary art

The old Episcopal castle of La Majorie devotes all of its historical spaces to works created within the last thirty years. The rooms are organized around the timeless themes of art, man and nature. This permits a dialogue between works produced by artists of different periods using different techniques and materials.

The visitor is greeted at the entrance by sideglances to the History of Art typical of the post-modern



*Luciano Castelli, Self-portrait, 1987,
acrylic on canvas, 100 x 80 cm.*

*Berclaz de Sierre,
Leonardo da Vinci
(from the serie Equivoques),
2001, colour photograph,
220 x 80 cm.*



Tendency to quote and recycle. Irony shares the lime-light with the celebration of art and its creators: great artists revisited by Berclaz de Sierre, the typical painter by Hervé Graumann, the artist as demiurge by Yan Duyvendak or as alchemist by Marina Abramovic. Room 12 presents a group of artists who call the nature of external reality into question no less than the



*Axel Hütte, Furka–Muttenhorn, 1994-95,
colour photograph, 99 x 131 cm.*

foundations of their own artistic practice. Their works show an elementary vision of nature and landscape at the same time as a concern to work as closely to their medium as possible: painting for Alois Lichtsteiner and Michel Grillet, sculpture for Pierre-Alain Zuber, photography for Thomas Ruff, Axel Hütte, Thomas Flechtner and Walter Niedermayr.

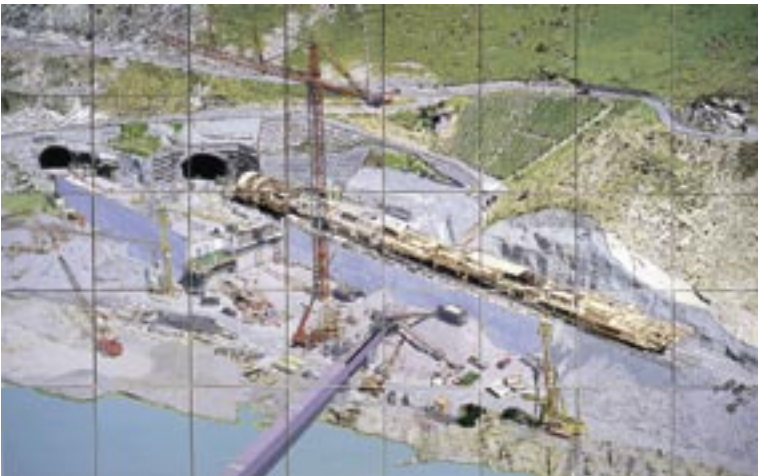
Rooms 14 and 15 bring us back to Man in his cultural relation to religion, identity and myth. Andrés Serrano and Yan Duyvendak create profane icons that combine the trivial and the sacred. The works of the two virtuoso painters Luciano Castelli and François Boson mix personal fantasies and cultural archetypes on the register of cries and murmurs.

The former reception hall of the bishop is open to con-



Monica Studer and Christoph van den Berg, Sea of Fog, 2003, inkjet print, 120 x 270 cm.

temporary and contrasting visions of the mountain. Gottfried Tritten celebrates its telluric and mythical power. A large embroidery piece designed by Maria Ceppi and executed under her supervision invites a fruitful encounter between tradition and technology. The artist duet Monica Studer and Christoph van den Berg question the stereotypes linked to the image of the mountain as it was devised by culture, tourism and the imagination.



Maria Ceppi, Document of Our Times, 2002-06, embroidery, 345 x 552 cm.

Public services

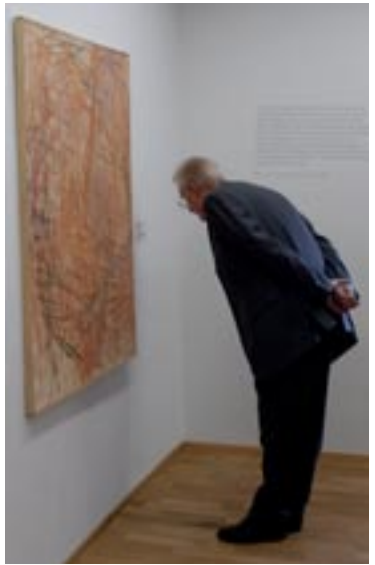
Guided tours free of charge on the first Sunday of the month at 11 o'clock (in French).

Guided tours for groups upon request.

Custom tours are available for (nearly) all types of visitors: schools, children, families, senior citizens, immigrants, the visually handicapped, etc.

Cafeteria (Beverages).

One of the two buildings of the Museum (Vidomnat Castle, rooms 1 to 10) is accessible to handicapped persons with escorts (please notify in advance).





Museum of Art, Sion

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Parking La Cible



Opening hours and accessibility

Open: Tuesday-Sunday 11:00 to 17:00.

Closed Mondays, as well as December 25 and January 1st.

Admission fees

Normal : CHF 5.-

Reduced: CHF 2.50

Family : CHF 10.-

Free admission on the first Sunday of the month

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(Wolf, Diday, Guigon)

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Ceppi, Ruff, Studer & van den Berg)*

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