

TWO EXHIBITIONS AND THREE PUBLICATIONS FOR THE MIH JUBILEE

The celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the inauguration of the Musée international d'horlogerie have been in full swing since the beginning of the year, and are gathering momentum in early spring. On Friday 22 March at 6pm, the MIH will simultaneously inaugurate two temporary exhibitions: the traditional retrospective of *New Acquisitions* and the thematic exhibition *MIH. 50 Years of a Monumental Showcase*. The exhibition offers an original interpretation of this Brutalist monument. It is accompanied by a reference publication entitled *The Musée international d'horlogerie of La Chaux-de-Fonds*, written by Nadja Maillard for the general public and tourists, published in English, French and German by the Société d'histoire de l'art en Suisse. Finally, *Le Carillon*, the annual message from the MIH Friends, together with a special anniversary issue looking back and forward, produced in collaboration with the Maurice Favre Foundation, will also be distributed from 22 March.

MIH. 50 Years of a Monumental Showcase

Fifty years ago, the Musée international d'horlogerie inaugurated a distinctive showcase for its exceptional collection: constructed primarily underground using concrete and complemented by avant-garde scenography. Devoid of any artificial embellishments, the project harmonizes seamlessly with its lush park surroundings, immersing visitors in the realm of time measurement. Initiated in 1972, the undertaking persevered despite the economic downturn that adversely affected the watch industry and the city of La Chaux-de-Fonds. The project reached its culmination, and on 19th October 1974, the present-day museum welcomed the public. In commemoration of this milestone, the 50th-anniversary monumental showcase exhibition unveils an era where watchmaking, museology, and architecture converge. It also serves as a precursor to the accomplishments that would leave a lasting imprint on the Parc des Musées in the decades that followed. The exhibition is organised in five sections:

Vibrancy

At the end of the 1960s, the watch industry went through a series of changes. Mass production, the appearance of new technologies, free trade, and the fluctuations in the global economy shook up pre-established markets and modes of production. These changes brought about a re-evaluation of all conventions. During this pivotal period, manufactures started to innovate, creating and imagining the watches of the future. The prevailing vibrancy at this time led to a series of innovations, with varying degrees of success. Some new additions, such as quartz, plastics, and even digital, built the aesthetic and technological foundations of current watchmaking.

The monumental showcase

MIH was built between 1972 and 1974 under the direction of La Chaux-de-Fonds-based architect Georges-J. Haefeli (1934-2010) and Pierre Zoelly (1923-2003), from Zurich. It was jointly financed by the City, the Canton, the State and the watch industry, under the aegis of the Fondation Maurice Favre, which was specially created in 1967 with the aim of providing La Chaux-de-Fonds with a new museum of watchmaking to reflect the importance of its collections.

The architects' conceptualization of the monumental showcase demonstrated an intelligent response to the program's requirements, successfully reconciling contrasting concepts and addressing scale-related challenges. Collaborations with specialists in building physics, notably civil engineer Pierre Beurret (1922-2016), and the construction firm Paci were integral to the project's success. Upon its inauguration, MIH received unanimous praise from the media and was honoured with the inaugural Swiss concrete architecture award, the Prix Béton, in 1977. Additionally, it was awarded the Prix Cembureau and was voted the European Museum of the Year in 1978.

An immersive projection with archive and current images recounts the epic story of the museum's construction, offering a new interpretation of this Brutalist-inspired monument. Testimonies from renowned architects, including the famous New York-based Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi, creator of the Acropolis Museum in Athens, highlight the building's construction features and reveal previously unpublished anecdotes from its inauguration 50 years ago.

A complete work

The interior layout of the museum was entrusted to a group consisting of Team BTG, Pierre Bataillard, Serge Tcherdyne and Mario Gallopini. Their role encompassed the creation and fitting of all technical aspects, notably including the design of the exhibition elements such as the display cases, but also the choice of furnishings to help enhance both the atmosphere and the comfort of visitors. Particular attention was paid to the transparency and the lightness of the exhibition supports, contrasting with the monolithic structure of the building whilst using it as a foundation. In this space, the MIH's furniture becomes an exhibition artefact in its own right. It is presented in the same way as the works of art that make up the collection.

Imagination

In 1968, the Fondation Maurice Favre organised an open competition for architects living or working in the canton of Neuchâtel. Alongside them, ten Swiss architects were invited to apply. The jury, formed of Swiss architects, politicians, industrialists, and those involved in local culture, was given 28 projects to consider. Nine proposals were selected for their superior qualities. Gnomon, from the architects Georges-J. Haefeli and Pierre Zoelly, received first prize. The models of the finalist projects from the 1968 competition are being re-exhibited for the first time.

Reinvention

In the final part of the exhibition, visitors are invited to imagine the future redevelopment of the museum using a LEGO. As the museum approaches a significant renovation phase, *MIH. 50 Years of a Monumental Showcase* foreshadows efforts to revitalize the Museum Park for decades to come.

A guide to the MIH architecture

The Société d'histoire de l'art en Suisse (SHAS) has published a guide to this exceptional museum entitled *The Musée international d'horlogerie in La Chaux-de-Fonds*. The book, published in English, French and German is edited by SHAS, whose national activities to promote building culture have long been recognised.

Written by Nadja Maillard, one of the world's leading experts on the architecture of the period, this accessible work provides valuable information for visitors to the museum and anyone interested in heritage. It is enriched by 57 illustrations, most of them previously unpublished, including current photographs, old views, archive documents, sections and plans.

A blend of stone, brick and concrete, this remarkable building is a manifesto of the Brutalist movement, while at the same time belonging to 'terratecture', a form of underground architecture that combines energy efficiency with low impact on the landscape. As discreet as the collections it houses are rich, this building received the Béton Prize in 1977 and was named European Museum of the Year in 1978.

Photos and documents

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oiEY-nlVeoFBVxHH8NsBRf-ktg7c_3Bd?usp=sharing

Additional SHAS press release

<https://www.gsk.ch/fr/node/20140>

New Acquisitions

The past year will go down in the annals of the MIH as one of the most significant in the history of MIH collections, with 280 pieces purchased and received. Among some twenty different donors, we should mention the generosity of two singular personalities, recently deceased, who have significantly enriched the MIH's collections.

Michel Huber (1950-2023), an independent designer based in Geneva who graduated in jewellery from the École d'art de La Chaux-de-Fonds, left his mark on the watchmaking world with his "Square" creation for the Ventura brand. This creation testifies to his commitment to the harmony of proportions. The watches in his collection, of which there are around fifty, are distinguished by their fluidity, combining extreme finesse with great rigour, transcending the conventional limits of watchmaking.

The collection bequeathed by Eduard Streit (1939-2023) through the Maurice Favre Foundation is distinguished by its exceptional technicality and the fine craftsmanship of the pieces that make it up. Each of the 180 watches carefully and patiently selected by Eduard Streit throughout his life testifies to a particular research or technical mastery, adding to our knowledge of the history of Swiss and European watchmaking from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.

0th issue of Le Carillon, plus a special edition

The Carillon, the annual newsletter of the MIH and the amsiMIH, went to press on the same occasion. It is prefaced by star architect Bernard Tschumi, who underlines the unique character of the MIH in its architectural and museographic design. This symbolic 50th issue, expanded to 16 pages, also serves as a catalogue of the 280 or so new acquisitions made in 2023.

A special large-format edition of Le Carillon will also be distributed from 22 March. It reminds everyone, both retrospectively and prospectively, of the role of the founding pillars of the MIH: the public authorities, the Maurice Favre Foundation and friends of the MIH, and launches a fundraising campaign with the aim of enabling the museum's flagship exhibition to be transformed once the renovation work on the building is complete.

Photos and documents

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nxWK2V4SFRBI0w_8v5IATswT-1kFf3V8?usp=drive_link

La Chaux-de-Fonds, 19th March 2024