

**Press release**

## **Bed stories**

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**We spend more time with our bed than with any other piece of furniture. The Swiss National Museum in Zurich presents four centuries of bedtime stories.**

We spend a third of our life in bed. No furniture item is dearer to us. In bed we are born, and there we die. It's where we make love, or recover from illness. Most of the time we sleep on this piece of furniture, but sometimes we simply lie there lost in our thoughts, listening to music or reading. Nowadays, the beds in our bedrooms are considered deeply personal places. When we have guests, the bedroom is usually off-limits. This hasn't always been the case. In the 17th century, the French King Louis XIV used the bedroom as a stage for his demonstrations of power. In the mornings the Sun King rose and shone before a selected audience, and when he settled down to sleep at night that too was a public act. Many European rulers copied the customs of the French court, and the bedroom soon became a status symbol. And the Swiss Confederation was no different.

As the 19th century progressed, the bedroom lost its public character and became more of a private space. A growing awareness of hygiene also began to change people's relationship with sleep. Bugs and nasty smells – accepted for centuries as a necessary evil – were now investigated and steps taken to eliminate them. Single beds replaced joint sleeping places shared by several people, wood was superseded by metal as the base material, and grandeur gave way to functionality. At the same time, the boundaries of modesty were raised. Increasingly, people no longer slept in groups, but alone and specially robed.

The exhibition 'Bedtime Stories' at the National Museum Zurich takes visitors on a tour of the bedrooms of Swiss society's upper echelons. From the 17th to the 20th centuries, a lot has changed.

**If you have any questions, please contact:**

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