

Press release

## Colours revealed by light Stained glass from the 13th to the 21st century

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**The vast array of subjects and the dazzling luminosity of stained glass have captivated viewers for centuries. The exhibition in the National Museum's Hall of Fame showcases Swiss stained glasswork in all its richly hued facets, from its origins in the Middle Ages through the Renaissance to the modern stained glass art of the present day.**

The Swiss National Museum owns one of the world's largest collections of stained glass works. The highlights of this collection form the starting point for a journey through the history of Swiss stained glass. Our journey begins in churches and monasteries, where the light streaming through the coloured windows into the hallowed interiors probably had much the same impact on churchgoers in the Middle Ages as it has today. The exhibition features works such as the 'Madonna of Flums' dating from the 13th century – the oldest surviving figural stained glass panel in Switzerland.

In the modern era, it became common practice in the Confederation, when a new building was constructed or an existing one refurbished, for benefactors to bear the costs for the design and manufacture of a window. In return, these sponsors were given the opportunity to have their coat of arms placed in the new window. The representatives of Confederate towns also put their coats of arms in the windows of council buildings, taverns and monasteries, giving expression for the first time to a 'Swiss' national consciousness. In the 19th century, the modern federal state reverted to this tradition of the *Standesscheibe*, stained glass that presented the coat of arms of a canton of the Old Swiss Confederacy, and donated the stained glass works in the Hall of Fame of the newly built National Museum (1898) and those in the domed hall of the parliament building (1901).

In the 20th century too, a number of town halls in major Swiss cities were presented with *Standesscheiben*, and stained glass is still a highly regarded art form today. One example is the glass windows in the Grossmünster in Zurich. In addition to the Augusto Giacometti stained glass panels in the chancel dating from 1933, the stained glass works by Sigmar Polke in the nave were added in 2009. To make them, the artist used a number of newly developed techniques. The exhibition displays the specimen glass panels made to Sigmar Polke's designs.

The essential working process for manufacturing stained glass has changed very little over the centuries. Myriad individual production steps are required to progress from the design stage through the selection and cutting of the coloured glass, to produce the finished glass artwork soldered with lead rods. In addition to more than 90 stained glass works dating from the Middle Ages to the present day, the exhibition also shows old tools from the Halter stained glass studio in Bern. Soldering irons, lead mouldings and a portable furnace give an insight into the elaborate technique of this craft.

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

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