

# Cultural promotion from national, cantonal and urban point of view

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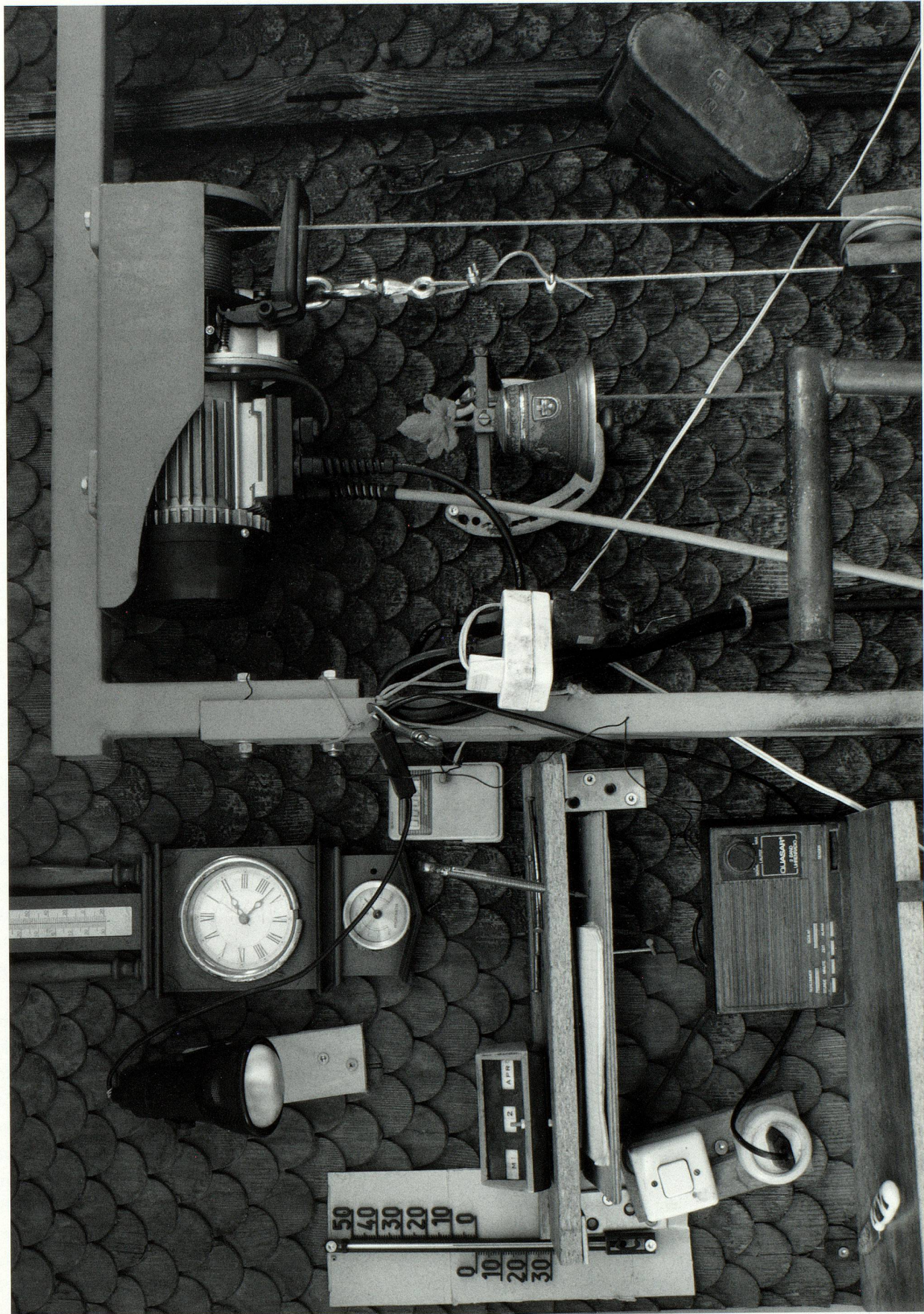
# CULTURAL PROMOTION FROM NATIONAL, CANTONAL AND URBAN POINTS OF VIEW

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**Marianne Burki** Whether "in the provinces" or not, is no issue for the cultural foundation Pro Helvetia (Arts Council of Switzerland). Geographically, the term "provinces" designates those regions outside a country's cultural and political centres, by contrast to its major cities. Promotion by Pro Helvetia targets national and international levels: it is the occasion that determines where something is to be set up. Whether in an urban or outlying setting, what matters is the impact on the chosen site. What may work in the mountains might not be successful in urban surroundings. And vice versa. Basically, Pro Helvetia seeks to support and promote exciting artistic events throughout Switzerland. The question remains standing. Does it imply neglect of outlying areas? Such a hypothesis collapses given the great number of projects carried out at different levels; the art shows in Môtiers or Bex come to mind, attracting a broad spectrum of visitors and also many specialists. Such occasions transform and mark the places where they are held, enabling artistic events that wouldn't even see the light of day in our so-called art centres. Art centres? Generally speaking, it is the cities that we tend to think of as venues for art. Cities boast more activities, and the market itself plays a greater role by providing larger audiences. Is it true, then, that outlying areas are at a disadvantage, that they receive fewer subsidies and less attention? Is cultural promotion on the outskirts given short shrift? Usually, art venues in rural or small-town surroundings are in fact less well endowed, and their lower visitor count goes against them. And yet, these small and middle-sized institutions have, over the last years, made a great impact on the contemporary art scene. Their size (or smallness) renders them more flexible than larger institutions; they can react more quickly to the art market and can thus pick up on the latest

trends at the right moment. Pro Helvetia can meet a proportionally larger share of their funding needs – perhaps a smaller total sum in the absolute – than it can for more generously structured institutions. The prerequisite for all this is locally-lent support. That makes for an interesting starting point: in places lacking a political will, artists have a hard time. Such a lack also curtails the possibilities Pro Helvetia has to offer: the foundation supports individual projects and not the structures behind them. It is engaged in the promotion of culture, granting subsidies to complement the limits or possibilities of a given site. Can artists afford to work only in outlying areas? Or to restrict themselves to only cities? To only Switzerland? "Provinces" arise wherever regional heroism is measured only against regional heroism – a phenomenon that exists the world over.

**Laurent Desarzens** In the year 1921, a French senator harshly criticized a certain artist and the latter's urban planning project, which was to be implanted in a provincial northern city. His tirade included a declaration that would go down in history: "Artists must suffer for their art!" Ever since, the phrase has continued to be fished up – with the ring of conviction – most especially by politicians seeking to dock or even entirely revoke budgets drawn up for cultural purposes. The artist victimized at the time never did receive the commission. In Switzerland, the so-called public lotteries have been operating for 75 years now, based on the principle that all their profits are to be redistributed to the general public. Numerous fields of endeavour – ranging from sports, to youth, health, the environment and even commerce, as well as culture – benefit from this contribution to their income. This represents an indisputable advantage for the Swiss cantons, as a backup to their own



efforts on behalf of the different realms of activity. Without the lotteries' financial help, many institutions would simply have to fold up. For instance, the Loterie romande allotted CHF 55,108,506 to the Canton of Vaud in 2007. That same year, Federal Councillor Samuel Schmid personally paid tribute to the indispensable contribution of inter-cantonal lotteries, acknowledging their support to the sum of around CHF 130 millions for Swiss sports. Nonetheless, a few years ago this system began to be challenged, particularly by the Federal Government, which has its eye on the lotteries' CHF 900 million annual profits: the idea is that these profits could be wholly or partially allotted to the old-age pensions fund. A bill to this effect was already turned down in 2003, but a revised draft could find its way back in through the rear door. Who would lend support to our regional social, cultural and sports institutions, were they to be deprived of this generous monetary blessing? Certainly not the cantons, who already provide a very large share. It could be that in the future we will have to suffer not only to produce art, but also to practice sports. Signatures are currently being sought to validate a Swiss people's initiative calling for "money games on behalf of the public welfare". The initiative underlines the important role that lotteries play on a regional basis and seeks to have the obligation to apply their gains to supporting public welfare causes laid down in the Federal Constitution. Obtaining a specific result matters less than triggering a real tidal wave, in order to make clear the vital role that these lotteries play for the associations and institutions of our country.

**Fabien Ruf** Globalization has us living in an ever more speed- and immediacy-conscious world, where the sky's the limit. In this sort of a network-inter-

connected context, which ends up abolishing time and space, art "from the provinces" is a thing of the past. This state of affairs could not only unleash a global identity crisis but – given the current overriding pressure to pursue a marketing policy – could also encourage artists to conform to the demands of the market, or to submit to a system with less creative freedom than desired. The danger that looms ahead is for artists to become businessmen on behalf of their own creations, slowly but surely, blurring the contours of their identity. Within this gigantic globalized network, public funding should be applied – today more than ever – to maintaining as much artistic diversity as possible, and to promoting innovation and change outside any state-controlled economic system. It is imperative, moreover, to maintain a balance between this ever-changing world of ours and the individuality that every artist has to offer, in order to avoid an all too striking artistic uniformity. Cities thus have a duty not only to promote and disseminate art, but also to ensure the mobility of the artists themselves, so as to foster interpersonal and artistic connections. It is important for this effort be outwardly directed, since any city – even a metropolis – that is too inwardly-centred will inevitably self-destruct, for lack of any new ideas. Therefore, cities have a vital obligation to offer their artists a chance to make a name for themselves within the city walls. This, in turn, enables the city (as a living organism) not only to identify itself with the works of its artists, but also to understand and acknowledge such works as a continuation of its own cultural history. In this vein of thinking, the City of Lausanne plans to establish a cultural meeting point in the heart of the city, where artists with highly diversified backgrounds, visitors to the city and players on the cultural scene could all convene.

