



E-Book

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· A balcony over the lake · The Garden · **Rousseau and the**
Il St. Pierre · Merz · **Meditations** · Hauterive

Longing for SWITZERLAND

Delphine Bovey

Longing for Switzerland

Delphine Bovey

LONGING FOR SWITZERLAND

Translation by Alison Anderson

Éditions Socialinfo

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Foreword

Longing for Switzerland

He implored me, as soon as he got off the plane. An old friend I'd run into during a delightful conference on the banks of the Saint Lawrence river. He had added, his tone firm and decisive: *"Show me Switzerland, astonish me !"*

I listened to him, enthralled by his eagerness, his enthusiasm. And yet a dull anxiety came over me: how can I astonish him? What can be astonishing about Switzerland ? How can you make someone long for Switzerland ?

The Matterhorn he knows. Bound to know Chillon Castle as well. He's already been lured to the shores of Lake Zurich and Lucerne's covered bridge. He'll have become acquainted with Basel and Bern thanks to the magic of Roger Federer, and an unforgettable stage of the Tour de France. We could always try Gruyères Castle, the Nestlé chocolate factory in Broc, or the casino in Lugano, before heading back to dream at the foot of Geneva's Jet d'Eau.

And then I came upon Delphine Bovey's manuscript. Sixty-six places, sixty-six images, sixty-six invitations to explore, steeped with promise and mystery. Let's leaf through it. The Middle of the World, in Pompaples. The Muzot castle, in Veyras, with Rilke. Tinguely's fountain in Fribourg. Nietzsche's house in Sils Maria. The church of angels on the Alpe Foppa or the Paul Klee Museum in Bern. A guidebook ? Yes. Do we dream of faraway places ? More than anything ! An urgent desire to board that train and peel away at the distance separating us from these marvels, from these promises of pleasure for both the eyes and the spirit. Why hesitate ? Why wait ?

*For the Éditions Socialinfo
Jean-Pierre Fragnière*

Introduction

It was the height of summer. The streets were full of colors, and the bright sun added a final touch to the festive air. Squares decorated with flowers were busy with people, café terraces were full, train stations grandiose. Drawn into a dance which wasn't their own, tourists struggled to their hotels, dragging their heavy suitcases. What sort of program was in store for them ? Which places would give them their very first emotional reactions to Switzerland ? I was beginning to envy them ; I wanted to have a longing for Switzerland.

Thus far I had resigned myself to leisurely Saturdays along Zurich's fashionable waterfronts, to a few afternoons daydreaming in smooth-stoned Ticino valleys, or rainy Sundays seeking consolation in cultural centers. Already a novice, and now I was about to be outdone by tourists even less experienced than I was. What could I do ? Like a craving that just wouldn't go away, a plan began to take shape : I would reclaim this territory I'd been rather sullenly avoiding, on the assumption, no doubt, that it was already, quite naturally, my birthright.

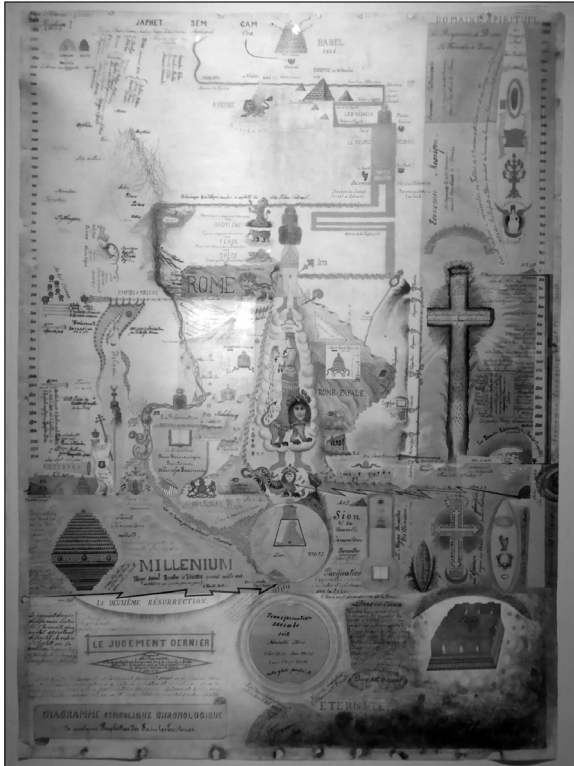
And so I traveled through Switzerland, over hill and dale, from medieval town to Alpine resort, past lakes and streams, to the very depths of the country. My guides ? The best to be had ! The great artists and thinkers who, thanks to the most disparate vagaries of circumstance, had been awestruck by a place, a place that had left its imprint, like a reflection of their imagination, or even an extension of their own existence.

Keeping well away from overcrowded, impersonal tourist attractions, I discovered these men and women and places, discreet, unusual, whose only principle when it came to exploration was silence. I grew so fond of them that I am sharing them with you in this book. This is not so much a guidebook as an invitation to leave behind the familiar shores of our childhood and return to our reading of the world.

Delphine Bovey

The Apocalypse according to Henri Dunant

International Red Cross & Red Crescent Museum, Geneva



From the central Cornavin train station,
take bus no 8 (direction OMS or Appia) to the “Appia” stop.

17 Avenue de la Paix
CH-1202 Geneva
www.redcrossmuseum.ch

Drawing by Henry Dunant (detail)

Tue-Sun : 10am-5pm
April-October
Tue-Sun : 10am-6pm

The Apocalypse according to Henri Dunant

International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum, Geneva

The soul of Jean-Jacques Rousseau lives on in the heart of Geneva's old town ; over in the international district, it is his compatriot, Henri Dunant, who guides the city in the expression of its global humanitarian role. Located opposite the magnificent Parc de l'Ariana, which is home to the UN Palace of Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross is the representative symbol of Swiss neutrality. The ICRC's imposing building houses the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum, opened in 1988 with the aim of continuing the work begun by its founder, Henri Dunant, citizen of Geneva.

Head to the north of the city, to Geneva's international quarter. Embassies, international organizations, museums, and the Place des Nations are the area's splendid occupants. Bullet-proof cars drive slowly along the impeccable, yielding asphalt of this vast urban space, proof of the city's desire for tolerance and hospitality. Ideally situated opposite the **Parc de l'Ariana** and the

Palace of Nations, the **International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent** now focuses its activity on three aims : the defense of human dignity, restoring family links, and reducing natural risks.

Born in Geneva to a middle-class family in 1828, **Henri Dunant** discovered his commitment to social action very early on. The young man, a fervent believer, became an employee in a bank, but went on nurturing his ideal of helping the poor, along with his ambition as a businessman. At the age of thirty-one he visited Napoléon III's camp, set up not far from the battlefield at Solferino, in the region of Lake Garda in Northern Italy. He was horrified by the sight of forty thousand dead and wounded, abandoned without help. Dunant discovered the terrible humanitarian shortcomings of the battlefield : the lack of trained personnel, of technical knowledge, of medical equipment, even of food — all to an alarming degree. He quickly set about organizing the care of the sick and wounded soldiers, soliciting the civilian population for help.

The memory of the agony and suffering he had witnessed remained vivid, and in 1862 he published *A Memory of Solferino*, describing the hidden but only too real face of war. When Switzer-

land proclaimed its neutrality and began to develop its humanitarian policy, the ideas expressed in Dunant's book found favor with a number of political and military notables in Europe. Thus in 1863 the International Committee of the Red Cross was founded, and one year later the first *Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field* was adopted.

Dunant would see a number of his ideas successfully applied. But before long there came difficult years, where he fell into debt and progressive isolation, and at the age of sixty-four he would withdraw permanently to a hospital in the town of Heiden, in the canton of Appenzell Ausser rhoden. In the isolation he found in Heiden, Henri Dunant explored mysticism and his own prophetic visions. He gave a free rein to the elaboration of **visionary drawings**. In a sort of cosmology of his entire philosophy, Dunant illustrated his theoretical vision, subsequent to his literary work. Of the four compositions he created, two are on display at the ICRC Museum. In the manner of a transcendental philosophy, they relate the history of humankind, inspired by the prophecies of the Old Testament and the Apocalypse. Natural laws, Dunant reminds us,



ICRC, Museum entrance and flag.

to which humankind has preferred the deviancies imposed by the construction of the Tower of Babel, tend irrevocably towards universal solidarity. Dunant was awarded the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901, and died nine years later, at the age of eighty-two.

The Ariana Museum

The architecture of the Ariana Museum, which is located in the very heart of the park of the same name, is worthy of an Italian palazzo. Its name derives from Ariane De la Rive, the mother of Geneva philanthropist Gustave Revilliod. The Museum's collections cover almost ten centuries of the history of ceramics, from Europe to the Middle East and Asia.
10 Av. de la Paix, CH-1000 Geneva
www.ville-ge.ch/ariana

Museum with a View

The Museum of Art and History (MAH)



From Geneva Cornavin train station,
take bus no 5 to the “Athénée” stop, located near the
museum.

2 Rue Charles Galland
CH-1202 Geneva
www.mah-geneve.ch

Tue-Sun
10am-6pm

Museum of Art and History (indoor detail)

Museum with a View

The Museum of Art and History, Geneva

At the end of the Promenade des Bastions, as you move away from the statues of the four religious reformers to reach the rue de Beauregard, the Parc de l'Observatoire overlooks Geneva with a broad panorama of the city and Lake Geneva. At the entrance to the old town, where the spires of the Cathédrale Saint-Pierre are visible, the Museum of Art and History also enjoys a splendid view. One of the three largest museums in Switzerland, considered a truly unique institution, the MAH is the guardian of an important cultural heritage, and since 1910 it has been exhibiting hundreds of Switzerland's most significant works.

Two boulevards surround the **Museum of Art and History (MAH)**. Its architecture immediately signals the importance of the mission with which it was entrusted upon its foundation at the end of the 19th century. Geneva had long aspired to bring its collections of art and history together in a single institution, and the plan received a boost in 1895 with the prospect of the national exposition, which would act as a catalyst. On October 15, 1910, the Museum

of Art and History (MAH) was inaugurated, displaying its vocation to preserve and enrich the country's significant cultural and historical heritage.

The Museum of Art and History has assembled an impressive collection of 650,000 works. They are divided into three categories: fine arts, applied arts, and archeology. In addition to painting, sculpture, etchings and historical and archeological objects, certain works, in particular those of **Ferdinand Hodler**, have made the MAH a powerful glue of regional identity, as well as a special place for a stroll or a first lovers' tryst.

Born in Bern in 1853, Ferdinand Hodler moved permanently to Geneva at the age of nineteen, after his apprenticeship as a painter and decorator. In 1881 he took part in the creation of the **Panorama Bourbaki by Édouard Castres** (see p. 171) and the Salon in Paris, with his famous self-portrait, *Le Furieux*. The creation of his first large-format canvas, *La Nuit*, in 1890, would raise Hodler to the rank of a great symbolist artist as well as the guardian spirit of the artistic transition that occurred between the 19th century and the modern era. Of all his production, however, it was the works he created during the last years of his life that would leave a defining representative mark of his country

beyond its borders, and upon the Swiss national consciousness. Hodler enjoyed considerable fame, and would return in his latter years to his favorite themes : self-portraits, women, death, eternity and, above all, his legendary representations of the world of the Swiss Alps.

By 1913, suffering from lung disease, Hodler rarely left his apartment in Geneva and painted mainly what he saw from his balcony. His art became increasingly radical, and began to tend toward abstraction. He sought to reconcile art and spirituality, dealt with certain themes borrowed from symbolism, and his work resorted to symmetry. Weary of his era's positivism, Hodler moved closer to a serial form, dictated by the progress of industrialization: it was through the repetition of the same elements, constantly varied and combined, that the quest of a perfect formal order was finally able to materialize.

The many landscapes he produced during this period, inspired by his view onto the Mont Blanc and Lake Geneva, are so many attempts to accede to the very essence of the art of painting. Reproducing the framing of a photographic zoom, Hodler's landscapes celebrate the splendor and monumental nature of the Swiss mountains, through the penetrating observation of his gaze.



Museum of Art and History (MAH)
(detail).

Never, before Hodler, had these summits been so well interpreted or so wonderfully enhanced with blue, producing abstract paintings of a sort that inspire meditation.

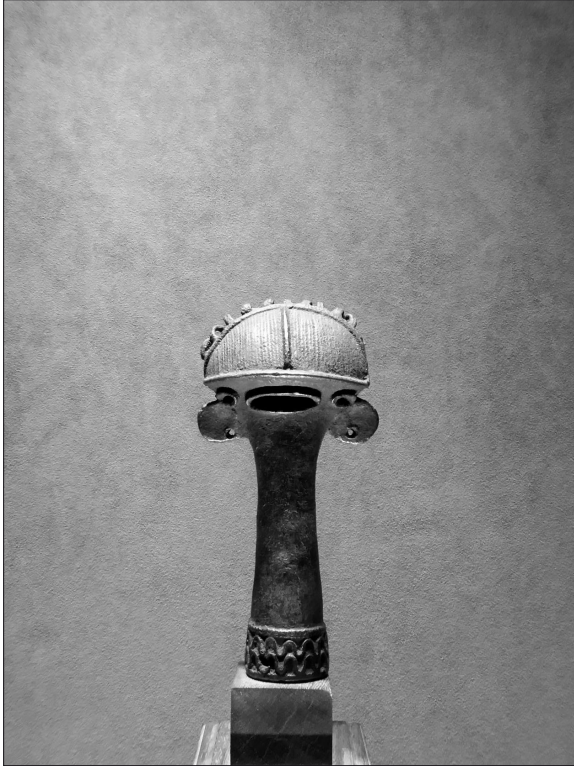
The Botanical Garden

A library, a herbarium, a research institute, laboratories, and an untold quantity of botanical greenhouses constitute the largest botanical garden in Switzerland. World renowned, the Conservatoire botanique, with its six million herbarium samples, is a veritable pearl for researchers the world over. Since 2012, three new pavilions have opened to welcome the public for a moment of relaxation.

www.ville-ge.ch/cjb/jardin.php

Tribal Goddesses in the City

Barbier-Müller Museum, Geneva



From Geneva Cornavin station,
bus lines 2, 3, 6, 7, 10 and 12 all stop at “Molard,”
while no 36 stops right outside the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall).

10 Rue Jean Calvin
CH-1204 Geneva
www.barbier-mueller.org

Open daily
11am-5pm

Barbier-Müller Museum (detail)

Tribal Goddesses in the City

Barbier-Müller Museum,
Geneva

Two thousand years of history have shaped the tiny streets of Geneva's old town, situated on a hill and home to the Cathédrale Saint-Pierre. With its cafés, antique shops, centuries-old boutiques and art galleries, the Place du Bourg-de-Four is a lively little historical and cultural center, where each facade seems to reflect a trace of the city's past. The old town would appear to be the guardian of a rich past, but it also preserves, in a more hidden way, the treasures of gods and goddesses handed down from our common ancestors.

An openness onto the world has always held a certain appeal for Geneva. From the end of the 19th century, cosmopolitanism began to give the city a new aspect. Home to the League of Nations from 1919 on, after the Second World War Geneva would reaffirm its international mission by becoming the headquarters of the United Nations. These different phases of progressive opening and the construction of the city's diplomatic identity on an international level would act as a stimulus to **Josef Müller**

when he set about putting together his collection of primitive art.

Tucked away among the winding streets of Geneva's old town, a little museum with a discreet entrance is actually a global reference in the matter. The **Barbier-Müller Museum** is home to the largest private collection of primitive art, that of Swiss collector Josef Müller. Founded in 1977, the museum has carried on a family tradition begun in the early years of the 20th century, which was to specialize in the collection of primitive artifacts belonging to the tribal societies of Antiquity as well as to the civilizations of Africa, Asia, and Oceania. In the course of its exhibitions by theme, the museum has unveiled some of its most handsome treasures : sculptures, masks, ornaments, textiles and a variety of everyday objects. Thus the entire world suddenly seems to be visible in its most primitive expression between the walls of this institution.

The works in the Barbier-Müller collection strike a particular sensitive chord in the viewer, because they reveal the existence of a universal bond among the members of the human race that goes beyond time and space. These primitive works remind us of the essential place occupied by artistic expression in the development of any civ-

ilization. Like some forgotten language that we are suddenly able to understand, these productions from another era seem to speak to us, enchant us, the moment we cast our eyes on them.

Because they primarily reproduce human features, primitive works become an emotionally moving mirror, suggesting the existence of a universal filiation among human beings. The statuettes on display at the museum arouse a child-like enjoyment through their reproduction of the most astonishing physiognomies. They offer a catalog of the numerous distortions that can affect the human face. Beauty, grace, finesse, elegance, and equilibrium ; or ugliness, deformity, and protuberances: expressivity is brought to a peak, while an entire range of feelings is there on display before us.

Generally created as gifts, or destined for a specific usage, these primitive artworks belong to a collective tradition, rather than to the creativity of one author. Unlike the works which drew collectors at the end of the 19th century, those which have gone to make up the Barbier-Müller collection show no traces of the exuberance often associated with the genius of a single artist.

Non-Western primitive art, so off-putting to Josef Müller's contempora-



Street in the old Town, Geneva.

ries, now occupies an essential place in the study and understanding of our shared cultural heritage. And so it is sometimes murmured that certain gods and goddesses of our ancestors from Africa, Asia and Oceania are sleeping with their eyes wide open, somewhere in the heart of the old town in Geneva.

The Ethnographic Museum of Geneva (MEG)

The MEG is a veritable Geneva institution. Its rich collections – five continents and over 1,500 cultures – have established its reputation on an international level. In 2014 the MEG acquired a new building, in keeping with its ambitions.

Boulevard Carl-Vogt 65-67

CH-1205 Geneva

www.ville-ge.ch/meg/index.php

A Balcony over the Lake

The Mont-Salève, Geneva



From Cornavin station, bus no 8 will take you to the end station at Veyrier-Douane, 7 km further. You can reach the summit of the Mont-Salève on foot or by cable car.

Route du Téléphérique
F-74100 Etrembières
www.telepherique-du-saleve.com

Open daily

Mont-Salève and Geneva

A Balcony over the Lake

The Mont-Salève, Geneva

Located in Haute Savoie on the border between France and Switzerland, the Mont-Salève is 1379 meters in altitude. On the French side, the Salève slopes gradually downward, but on the Geneva side the mountain is steep, almost vertical. One of its rocky corridors, Varappe, has given its name, in French, to the sport of rock-climbing, while for the last 120 years now, it has been easy to reach the summit by cable car. With its incomparable shape and its plateau overlooking Geneva and the lake, the Salève is the source of many legends, and it inspired both the Romantic movement and naturalism in the 18th century.

Technically, it is registered in France, even if the inhabitants of Geneva shamelessly claim it as their own. Its lovely Celtic name, first mentioned in writing in the 4th century, prophetically qualifies it as the “brilliant mountain.” **The Salève** has continued to nourish legends and foster envy, acquiring a renown that far surpasses its modest altitude.

The legend of the Salève began

in the hands of Gargantua. The ogre was said to have piled up a mountain of boulders by digging a pool in the banks of the Rhône river to quench his thirst. Subsequent to this legendary creation, the hills and soil of the Salève were home to many pioneering acts, granting a founding role to the “mountain of the Genevans” in the realms of art, climbing, geology, and the appreciation of nature.

Beyond the myths and the records, the massif owes its emblematic image to *The Miraculous Draft of Fishes* (*La pêche miraculeuse*), a painting by Konrad Witz from 1444. The picture illustrates two stories from the Gospel : The Appearance of Jesus by the Lake and Jesus Walking on the Waters. Saint Peter, the Apostles, and Jesus are portrayed in a landscape painted from Geneva where we can see the lake and the Petit Salève (which together with the Pitons and the Grand Salève goes to make up the Salève) on the right. This painting is held to be the first painting in the history of art to show a landscape in a realistic manner. Thus this is how the Salève, in the 15th century, inaugurated the realistic representation of landscape, becoming an indisputable pictorial symbol.

By the 18th century Geneva had

become a vibrant cultural and intellectual center. Because of its proximity to the city, the Salève would frequently be associated with the emergence of the Romantic movement and naturalism. The Geneva mountain became one of the most oft-described and represented landscapes on the continent. Naturalist and mountain climber **Horace-Bénédict de Saussure** practiced on its steep limestone cliffs before conquering the Mont Blanc. It was there that he established the founding principles of rock-climbing, in the spot known as the “Varappes.” **Rousseau** spent two years of his youth in Bossey, at the foot of the Salève. **Lamartine** wandered along its paths. Voltaire sought refuge there. **Mary Shelley** set one scene in *Frankenstein* there. Finally, the Salève also achieved prominence as a shrine for the appreciation of nature. To this day it proudly maintains its vocation as a vista point over Geneva, the lake, the Jura mountains, the High Alps, the Dents du Midi, the Aiguille Verte, and the Mont Blanc. Capitalizing on the plateau’s exceptional views has long been a priority, as well as a veritable commercial and tourist enterprise.

With its piedmont, slopes, and pastures, the massif constitutes a coherent ensemble, a much sought-after natural



Café Le Remor.

space corresponding to our basic needs for relaxation and a change of scenery. A place for innovation, initiation, inspiration and exploration, which has influenced any number of disciplines and famous people, the Salève has preserved its vocation as a remarkable observatory of landscapes, and admirably continues to defend its title of the “balcony over Geneva.”

Le Remor

It is impossible to resist the urge to find a table at this Geneva institution, just across from the Plaine de Plainpalais. More than just a café, Le Remor has been welcoming lovers of ice cream and pastries since 1921. Santo, Bortolo, Peppino, and Giorgio, four brothers who left northern Italy to learn their trade in Vienna, founded a veritable dynasty of ice-cream makers, both in Switzerland and abroad.

3 Place du Cirque
CH-1204 Geneva
www.remor.ch

At the Origins of the World

Forestay Waterfall, Chexbres



From Vevey,
take the funicular up to the stop Chexbres-Village.
Continue on foot down the Rue de la Place de la Gare,
then take the Rue du Carroz to the Route de la Corniche.
Keep going as far as the Baron Tavernier hotel. The waterfall will
be to the left of the hotel.

Route de la Corniche 4
CH-1070 Chexbres
www.barontavernier.ch

Open daily

Forestay Waterfall

At the Origins of the World

Forestay Waterfall, Chexbres

At the heart of an idyllic clearing, a little stream flows gently from a picturesque waterfall. This could be the description of any ordinary waterfall, since it does seem to illustrate an archetypal image, one which belongs to our shared pictorial vocabulary. But even the most obvious images must come from somewhere. It was during a brief stay in Bellevue, near Chexbres, above Lake Geneva and the winemaking villages of Epesses and Saint-Saphorin, that Marcel Duchamp came upon his ideal waterfall.

On the Corniche road, it is only too easy to go along one's way and never realize there is a waterfall nearby. Even when you do know, your gaze has a natural tendency to gape at the breathtaking panorama unfolding below you : allegedly one of the most beautiful on the planet. The view drops down into the lake, encompassing the famous terraces of Lavaux and their vineyards, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was this unrestricted view over Lake Geneva, however, a source of inspiration for so many poets and artists, that **Marcel Duchamp** shamelessly decided to ignore,

turning instead to the far more secretive situation of the Forestay waterfall.

In 1946, the artist spent five days at the Hôtel Bellevue (now the Baron Tavernier) near Chexbres, together with his American friend **Mary Reynolds**, a collector of modern art, with whom he was traveling through Switzerland. It was here, next to the hotel and above the steep vineyards of Dézaley, that Duchamp came upon the waterfall that would inspire his last masterpiece and one of his most mysterious works, the installation *Étant donné : 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage*. (Given : 1° *The Waterfall*, 2° *The Illuminating Gas*.)

This installation, which at the time was a novel artistic form, resembles the exact transposition of Duchamp's own famous assertion that "the spectator makes the picture." Through a little hole in a wooden door, the spectator-voyeur is invited to peek at the scene unfolding on the other side: a woman's entirely naked body, lying on a carpet of wild grasses, and holding in her hand a gas lamp, her legs spread at an angle that reminds the viewer of **Courbet's** *L'Origine du Monde*. In the background on the right is the Forestay waterfall, a true archetype : like a second vulva belonging to an original nature, letting the water gush forward from between its walls

with an incomparable vital force.

Duchamp's art is characterized by daring artistic moves, and it frequently was innovative in a way that was radical for his time. With *Étant donné*, the man of the “ready-mades” suddenly made a surprisingly anachronistic move, which undeniably clashed with the label of precursor with which he had been stuck. By deliberately turning his back on Lavaux, Duchamp allowed himself to orient his gaze toward the center of the earth and to re-position his work within a long romantic tradition, the very same that drove so many other artists to choose Lake Geneva as their subject.

In the idyllically calm setting, virtually unseen by the human eye, Duchamp would find the keys to a special relationship with bountiful, generous nature. In choosing the hidden face of this grandiose landscape, commonly referred to as “the balcony of the world,” the artist focused his attention on the primary source of beauty. Because it constitutes an enigmatic projection into a place that is still this side of the primary scene, the Forestay waterfall becomes an allegory for what is concealed or buried, or for everything that one generally hides from view. Numerous vista points have been created in the region to allow the visitor to admire



Route de la Corniche.

the panorama. Long before the appearance of cell phones and the fashion of selfies, Duchamp had understood that to capture a landscape, at times the best thing is to turn one's back on it.

The Kunsthalle Marcel Duchamp

Located on the quai de l'Indépendance in Cully, as if it had spilled down the terraces of Lavaux, the Kunsthalle Marcel Duchamp is an installation-museum. Nicknamed “the world's smallest museum,” it consists of one illuminated box, permanently on display.

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