

Press release

March 2018

In Search of Style. 1850 to 1900

National Museum Zurich | 23/03 – 15/07/18

The Great Exhibition, the first world exhibition in London in 1851, heralded the start of a new era. A journey through time in Europe and Switzerland between 1850 and 1900 reveals the quest for beauty, elegance and style in home interiors, everyday products, paintings and buildings. During this period, major cities began to look like they do today, schools of arts and crafts were founded, and collections of samples were amassed. An impassioned debate arose around appropriate style.

Revolutionary inventions, such as the light bulb and the telephone, became affordable for a wide range of consumers thanks to new mass production methods. As products became more widespread, increasing demands were also placed on their appearance. Everyday things not only needed to be practical from now on but attractive as well. Mechanised production gave the textile industry an innovative boost. It extended the range of fabric processing and design possibilities with chemical processes. In construction, new materials like steel, concrete and glass were used, and art distanced itself from the academies. Painters moved away from the clearly defined genres and implemented their own ideas. This mood of change gave rise to new styles.

So-called designers – designare, désigner or to design is all about drawing and creating – had to be trained, leading to the establishment of schools of arts and crafts all over Europe. They systematically put together collections of samples which served as an inspiring example for students. Art and craftsmanship should no longer be opposites; instead they should unite to form a new discipline.

With over 300 textiles, pieces of furniture, drawings and paintings on display, the exhibition “In Search of Style. 1850 to 1900” delves into these 50 formative years and tells visitors all about architecture, art, craftsmanship and industrialisation. The exhibition is enriched by extraordinary exhibits on loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art (MAK) in Vienna and the renowned Museum of Textiles in Lyon.

The exhibition at the National Museum is linked to the “Ideal Living” show that has just opened at the Museum of Design. The latter is presenting trends in Swiss furniture design from the 20th century. The two exhibitions are connected by a themed trail through Platzspitz park.

E-guides are available free of charge for your smartphone. It will also be possible to visit both on the same day with a combined ticket (CHF 15 instead of CHF 10 each) between 23 March and 15 July.

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