

“In Search of Style. 1850 to 1900”

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

## Themes of the exhibition

### Architecture

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cities such as Paris, London and Vienna began to look like they do today. Back then, the course was set for the future of architecture. It was also a time when the infrastructure of these urban centres was developed and the first public transport networks were created. The London Underground was built, for example, and railways connected European cities. The ideas of Gottfried Semper and Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc were very influential. Both men drew from past eras – Semper from antiquity and the Renaissance, Viollet-le-Duc from Medieval Gothic – and combined these historical ideals with new techniques and building materials. Steel, concrete and glass would dominate the architecture of cities in the future.

### Technology

The technological upswing in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was rapid. Electrification changed not only industrial production but also society. Consumer goods such as the light bulb and clothes iron brought comfort to private households, water pipes and sewer systems improved hygiene, and the telephone opened up new possibilities in communication. How can a product be elegant and remain functional at the same time? Inventors initially paid only casual attention to the design of their products rather than consider this consciously. This called for designers – a new profession was born.

### Arts, crafts and design

With the new consumer goods which became affordable for a broad section of the population, the appearance of products grew in importance. At the first world exhibition in London, the French led the way on style. Other countries had a lot of catching up to do given that their products were somewhat less elegant according to contemporary tastes. Schools of arts and crafts were founded, and collections of samples were created. The equivalence of art and craftsmanship was propagated by British art historian John Ruskin in his work “The Two Paths” published in 1859.

## **Art**

Numerous artists left the academies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and turned to new artistic ideals. Arnold Böcklin, Albert Anker, Ferdinand Hodler and other Swiss artists received inspiration and training abroad and then returned home with new ideas. Genres began to break down, and the dividing lines between once clearly distinct forms of art became blurred. Many artists reflected on the past and came up with new styles. Since then we have referred to these as Impressionism, Realism and Symbolism.

## **Textiles and collections of samples**

The watchmaking and textile industries were the first to establish schools of arts and crafts in Switzerland, and they created collections of samples and models. These formed the basis for technical and design innovations. For example, Charles Wetter from eastern Switzerland developed guipure, as it became called, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This involves stitching embroidery onto a base fabric using a machine. The fabric is then etched away again thanks to a chemical process. What remains is an “openwork” fabric, confusingly similar to the precious laces of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The successful eastern Swiss companies Jakob Schlaepfer AG and Forster Rohner AG are still using new embroidery techniques to develop wonderful fabrics that are highly sought after by fashion houses of the 21st century all over the world.