

Press release

Highlights of the Gottfried Keller Foundation

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The collection of the Gottfried Keller Foundation is one of the most important collections of Swiss art. Now, for the first time in almost 30 years, the Foundation's most exquisite masterpieces are to be exhibited together again, with parallel exhibitions at the National Museum Zurich and the Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana in Lugano.

The Gottfried Keller Foundation was established in 1890 by Lydia Welti-Escher, the sole heir of politician, business leader and railway entrepreneur Alfred Escher, when she bequeathed a significant portion of her fortune to the Swiss Confederation. The earnings generated by the Foundation were to be used to purchase major works of art for Switzerland. In the federal spirit of her native country, Lydia Welti-Escher stated that the works acquired should not be exhibited at a single location, but were instead to be distributed across Switzerland's museums as their own holdings.

To date, the Foundation has acquired over 6,500 works of art. The collection is part of the Federal government's art collection, managed by the Federal Office for Culture. At present, around 70 museums and 30 other institutions in 23 cantons hold works on permanent loan from the Gottfried Keller Foundation. This is how one of the most important collections of Swiss art from the 12th to the 20th centuries was created. In addition to paintings and sculptures, over the years stained glass, photographs, goldsmith objects and properties, such as St George's Abbey in Stein am Rhein, have been added to the collection. Over the years, the Foundation has on numerous occasions helped ensure that cultural assets of significance for Switzerland were able to be rescued or repurchased from abroad.

Almost 30 years after the Foundation's last exhibition, the highlights of the collection can now be seen together for the first time. The exhibition in Zurich chronicles the history of the Foundation, and showcases the collection's diversity with a host of precious objects. These treasures include the reliquary bust of Saint Peter from the 14th century, and the St. Katharinental monastery hymnal dating from 1312. With its lavishly decorated initial letters, the hymnal is among Switzerland's most important works of Gothic art. Works from the pioneering days of photography, such as the daguerreotypes of Jean-Gabriel Eynard-Lullin (1775-1863), can also be seen.

The exhibition in Lugano (24.03.–28.07.2019) uses masterpieces of painting to show the main stages of the history of art in Switzerland in the last two centuries. In addition to works by Hodler and Giacometti, the famous triptych *Werden – Sein – Vergehen* by Giovanni Segantini will be on show outside St. Moritz for only the second time in almost 100 years.

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