



## PRESS KIT

### MIR

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## 1. The MIR: a forum for history and dialogue

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Since its opening in April 2005, the **MIR (International Museum of the Reformation)** has been presenting the history of the Reformation – born of the German reformer Luther’s protest in 1517 and pursued by Calvin in Geneva as of 1536 – in a lively and engaging manner.

The MIR illustrates the history of this great movement from its origins to the present through a rich collection of archival documents and iconography.

The MIR is also a forum for dialogue, a place to discuss the role of religion in the contemporary world from a cultural perspective. One of its aims is to encourage a conversation among different faiths and Christian traditions.

The MIR is located in the heart of Geneva’s old town, in a beautiful 18th-century mansion, the Maison Mallet. State-of-the-art technology is seamlessly integrated into the classical elegance of a grand, 14-room, 400m<sup>2</sup> apartment.

### A prize-winning museum

The MIR was awarded **the Council of Europe Museum Prize** in April 2007. This coveted distinction is handed out every year since 1977 to an institution that has made an outstanding contribution to our knowledge of European heritage and culture. The aim of the prize is to foster a better understanding of the rich diversity of European culture. Winners are chosen by the Parliamentary Assembly’s Committee on Culture, Science and Education on the basis of recommendations made by the European Museum Forum.

In their report, the jury praised the MIR for its religious tolerance and the humour that enlivens every room, and noted the “particular daring” of an interactive exhibit explaining the theological debate over predestination.

The MIR was also rewarded for the quality of its publications on the history of the Reformation and for its outstanding use of a highly symbolic building, the Maison Mallet, an 18th century mansion built on the very site where the Reformation was adopted in 1536.



## 2. The Maison Mallet and “Espace Saint-Pierre”

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The splendid 18-th century mansion known as “Maison Mallet”, home of the MIR, offers visitors two different ways of encountering the past: by exploring the history of the Reformation, and by discovering a typical classical-era dwelling.

This beautiful townhouse was built by Gédéon Mallet, a descendant of French Huguenots who settled in Geneva in the 16th century. The house is entered from the Rue du Cloître via an inner courtyard. An original sculpture by jeweller Gilbert Albert graces the charming courtyard fountain.

The museum extends over 400 m<sup>2</sup> on the ground floor and cellars of the Maison Mallet. The original 18th-century décor was recreated in the library, dining room and salon. The historic cellars address the 19th, 20th and 21th centuries.

### “Espace Saint-Pierre”: a “three in one” interactive space

Another attractive feature of the MIR is its position in the heart of Geneva’s historic old town, next to Saint-Pierre Cathedral and its archaeological site.

The two museums and the cathedral and towers have been combined into a single entity called “Espace Saint-Pierre”, so as to make the most of their considerable synergies, and enhance their attractiveness, particularly through a combined admission ticket to all three sites.

In 2008, the archaeological site was a medallist in the “Conservation” category of the **European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage**, awarded by the Europa Nostra Federation. This distinction recognizes the important research carried out on the site, which was completed in 2006 after more than 30 years of excavations.

In 2009, Saint-Pierre Cathedral was awarded the prestigious **European Heritage Label**, confirming its importance in European history and culture.



### 3. The Reformation and Geneva

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On 21 May 1536, the citizens of Geneva proclaimed the Reformation in the cloister of Saint-Pierre Cathedral, on the site now occupied by Maison Mallet, home of the MIR. For Geneva, the Reformation was synonymous with revolution: by renouncing the Catholic faith, the Genevèse also broke from their ruler, the Bishop of Geneva, to become an independent republic. This decision was to shape the destiny of the city in the centuries that followed. John Calvin was only 27 years old, in July 1536, when Guillaume Farel, the first to preach the reformed doctrine in the city, persuaded him to stay and help establish the new republic.

Through his ideas and his actions, Calvin fashioned the small republic into one of the centres of Christianity. Despite constant threats from its powerful neighbour the Duke of Savoy, Geneva became a city of refuge for thousands of men and women in search of a place where they could freely practice their faith. The refugees contributed the leadership the city so direly needed. To this day, many street names attest to the importance of refugee families such as the Candolle, Trembley, Sarasin, Turretini, Micheli, or Fatio.

The Academy, founded by Calvin in 1559 (later to become the University of Geneva), played an important role as the “seedbed of European Calvinism”. Protestants saw Geneva as a “new Jerusalem”, whereas their Catholic adversaries sought by all means to destroy what they viewed as a nest of heretics.

Reformed Geneva remained independent in the face of the territorial ambitions of Savoy – most notably during the attempted invasion of 1602 known as the *Escalade*. The reputation of the city as the capital of Calvinism attracted a new influx of refugees in the late 17th century after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV. Huguenots fled France in the hundreds of thousands; Geneva welcomed many of them. These later refugees were the artisans of Geneva’s reputation in the 18th century: they included watchmakers, jewellers and enamellers, like the Barde, Terroux and Liotard families, and business dynasties, such as the Boissier, Sellon and Cazenove, who turned the city into an important centre of banking.

## 4. A dynamic and lively museum

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The MIR is a dynamic institution. A dedicated team develops cultural programmes and organizes temporary exhibitions of a very high calibre.



### TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

#### **“The Sky Before Us: Photography and sacred architecture” (2015)**

On the occasion of their 10th and 20th anniversaries, the MIR and Mamco jointly presented a temporary exhibition dedicated to photography. This ambitious collaboration between two of Geneva’s most prominent cultural and historical institutions took a resolutely contemporary approach. The works on display, by contemporary artists from Switzerland, Germany and Great Britain portrayed interiors and exteriors of sacred buildings in various countries.

#### **« 1814, the first genevoiseries ? Caricature by Adam Töpffer » (2014)**

As part of a series of events commemorating the bicentenary of Geneva’s admission into the Swiss Confederation, the IMR presented a selection of caricatures by the famous painter Adam Töpffer, in which he attacked the politicians who played an active role in the Restoration of Geneva and its incorporation into Switzerland. The 40 watercolours in the temporary exhibition, which took place from October 2014 to February 2014, were on loan from Musées d’Art et d’Histoire and private collections. They presented a vivid portrait of Restoration society and life in Geneva between 1814 and 1817.

#### **“Hell or Paradise : the Origins of Caricature” (2013)**

Caricatures lampooning the faults of the Church have existed for centuries ; the imagery of the Middle Ages was full of strange creatures, and illuminated manuscripts contain many splendid examples of satire. Many engravings, flyers, medals or other objets from this period display crude, aggressive, sometimes even scatological images. Artefacts from Geneva as well as Swiss and European institutions, some of which were being exhibited for the first time, were presented during this temporary exhibition that took place between October 2013 and February 2014.

### **“Ancient Perfumes, Biblical Scents” (2012)**

The Bible is full of fragrant stories... so, for its third temporary exhibition, the IMR decided to put perfume in the picture! from June to October 2012, “Ancient Perfumes, Biblical Scents”, allows visitors to explore the olfactive dimension of the ancient world.

### **“Calvin World” (2011)**

For the 500th anniversary of the birth of the reformer John Calvin, photographer Nicolas Righetti and journalist Pierre Grosjean travelled to five continents to meet forty people named Calvin. In front of the camera, 8 women and 32 men, aged 9 to 79, revealed their personalities as modern-day Calvins. Most feel no direct connection to the great reformer, but all in their own way express a rich sense of identity. The IMR invited the artists to display their work in a temporary exhibition from June to September 2011.

### **“A Day in the Life of John Calvin” (2009)**

On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of John Calvin’s birth (1509–2009), the IMR organised a series of activities, either alone or with other institutions, between March and end of October 2009.

## 5. The MIR celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary

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### 15 APRIL 2005 – 15 APRIL 2015 : MEMORIES FROM THE PAST 10 YEARS *ISABELLE GRAESSLÉ, FORMER DIRECTOR*

“I remember snow falling on Cour Saint-Pierre, as stalls recreating a Reformation-era village were hurriedly being set up. The weather was not on our side: capricious as always in April, it threatened to ruin the **opening festivities**.

I remember the **ribbon-cutting** ceremony, performed by a trio of women, which included the Federal chancellor, the president of the Geneva Council of State and the vice-chairwoman of the MIR – three smiling, enthusiastic godmothers for a newborn museum.

I remember the **solemn ceremony in Saint-Pierre Cathedral**. The powerful, encouraging speeches. And the sudden irruption of Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung’s startling words, which rang like an invocation to constantly question what we know. What would the Reformation be without a dash of revolution?

I remember **comedian Marie-Thérèse Porchet** guiding dumfounded visitors through the museum with her particular brand of irreverent humour. And Bernard Haller performing his skit of a pastor for the first time at Saint-Pierre Cathedral, a performance that was also his last. We laughed at his hilarious portrayal, but it mirrored an uncomfortable truth – many pastors are dreadfully boring!

I remember our first **fundraising trip to the United States**, a succession of visits to universities and meetings with church leaders and influential groups. Especially memorable was a lunch with a group of Texan ladies who were amazed to hear that European Calvinists no longer believed in predestination.

I remember the **MIR's first anniversary in May 2006**, amid books, a printing press, children's laughter and radiant sunshine. The life of the new museum began to take form: a wonderful dinner and talk by German historian Rudolf von Thadden, the launch of our newsletter "Nouvelles du MIR", a packed first conference series, new displays for our permanent collection, such as a section about Luther, and our first publications.

I remember receiving the **Council of Europe Prize 2007** in the reception hall of the Palais de Rohan in Strasbourg. Cameras flashed, as, filled with emotion and pride, I firmly grasped the statuette designed by Juan Miró, like a talisman for a glowing future. I felt the same deep emotion, when, later that year, I opened a box from London containing Calvin's report on the suicide of Jean Vachat. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we were able to bring this document back to Geneva to share it with the public, thereby restoring a piece of the Reformation's material and immaterial heritage to its rightful place.

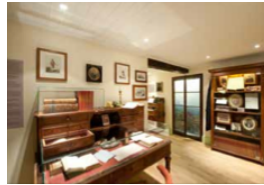
I remember the many **gifts and loans that have enriched our permanent collection**, including a pastel by Liotard and a portrait of Luther by Lucas Cranach the Elder.

I remember the **Calvin jubilee year**, in 2009, and the visitors who thronged to our first temporary exhibition, which featured virtual-reality reconstructions of Calvin's time. Not to mention several other exhibitions that same year, such as one in Dordrecht, which was inaugurated by Queen Beatrix. And how could I forget the statue of Calvin unveiled in Havana at the request of Cuban Protestants? To think that Calvin now stands smiling under the Caribbean sun!

I remember the delighted faces of so many children as they turned the handles on our animated displays, explored the museum at night with flashlights, diligently participated in educational activities, and realised that 'what lies behind the images' does not necessarily conform to the historical reality. Those early **visitor outreach** events were a first step towards what has since grown into a rich programme of entertaining, professionally run activities.

I remember the **exhibition about historical and Biblical perfumes**. Their powerful, evocative scents lingered long after the exhibition ended. May their sweet aroma envelop our 10th anniversary celebrations and continue to follow our steps for the next ten years.





MUSÉE INTERNATIONAL DE LA RÉFORME  
Avenue de Clavinet 10001 Saint-Pierre, CH-1204 Genève  
Ouvert du mardi au dimanche de 10h00 à 17h00  
Tél. 022 310 34 31, www.musee-reforme.ch



ANNIVERSARY DAY, APRIL 18<sup>th</sup> 2015



## ARTISTIC PROJECT *SOLA SCRIPTURA*, DECEMBER 2015

On the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the MIR, the association of the friends of the International Museum of the Reformation (**AmiduMIR**) entrusted the **Geneva University of Art and Design (HEAD - Genève)** with the organization of a competition open to the students of the school for an artistic intervention on the wall of the “Maison Mallet”, home of the MIR.

*Sola Scriptura*, created by **Christian Bili**, graduated artist of HEAD - Genève who won the competition, unveiled a contemporary interpretation of the **Geneva Bible**, published in 1669 in Amsterdam by Louys et Danjel Elzevier. The text of the first gospels was transcribed continuously in binary language and reproduced by two spotlights illuminating the wall of the “Maison Mallet”.



## 5. The IMR in brief

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- A prestigious location in the **Maison Mallet**, 4 rue du Cloître, 1204 Geneva
- Almost **400 m<sup>2</sup>** on two levels: ground floor and the historic cellars
- **Winner of the Council of Europe Museum Prize 2007**
- **“Espace Saint-Pierre”, a “three in one” offer:** the IMR, Saint-Pierre Cathedral and its towers, and the archaeological site constitute a coherent combined attraction for visitors.
- **14 rooms**, plus a museum shop
- Around **615 original objects** on display: paintings, engravings, books, manuscripts, medals and other artefacts, such as communion chalices, Huguenot crosses and Pentecost crosses
- **147 rare books, engravings and coins** from the time of the Wars of Religion in France (second half of the 16th century) donated by art collector Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller
- **1 online shop on the website [mir.ch](http://mir.ch)**
- An activity for children called **“The MIR superheroes”** with **SuperTheo, SuperCalvin, SuperJohn et SuperFarel** and downloadable **teaching kits** on [mir.ch](http://mir.ch)
- **An association of 750 friends of the museum**, the **AmiduMIR**, that aims to promote and support the MIR in Geneva, Switzerland and abroad.

### **The MIR: a private institution**

The MIR is a fully private institution that relies on the generous support of donors and patrons.

## 7. Practical information

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**MIR** (International Museum of the Reformation)

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1204 Geneva

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F. : +41 22 319 70 30

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[info@mir.ch](mailto:info@mir.ch)

- Opening hours: **Tuesday to Sunday, 10 am to 5 pm**. Open also on the following Mondays and public holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, August 1st (except when it falls on a Monday), Jeûne genevois (Thursday after the first Sunday in September) and Jeûne Federal (Second Monday in September).
- Free audio guide in French, German and English
- Guided tours in several languages on prior reservation
- Free admission for the disabled

**MIR admission:**

**Adults** : CHF 13.-

**Concession** : CHF 8.- and CHF 6.-

**Combined ticket « Espace Saint-Pierre »:**

- the MIR

- the Cathedral and the towers

- the Archeological site

**Adults** : CHF 18.-

**Concession** : CHF 12.- and CHF 10.-

A selection of free visuals are available on [mir.ch](http://mir.ch), click on “**Press**”.