



PRESS KIT MIR

TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

“THE SKY BEFORE US: PHOTOGRAPHY AND SACRED ARCHITECTURE”

FROM 29 APRIL TO 25 OCTOBER 2015



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mir.ch

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April - October 2015

1. Temporary exhibition: “The Sky Before Us: Photography and sacred architecture”

On the occasion of their 10th and 20th anniversaries, the MIR and Mamco are jointly presenting the temporary exhibition “**The Sky Before Us: Photography and sacred architecture**”, from 29 April to 25 October 2015.

This ambitious collaboration between two of Geneva’s most prominent cultural and historical institutions takes a resolutely contemporary approach. The works on display, by contemporary artists from Switzerland, Germany and Great Britain, portray interiors and exteriors of sacred buildings in various countries.

“The contrast between the MIR and Mamco is immediately obvious. The style of the buildings where they are located is very different, and so is the experience of visiting them. But below the surface, the two museums share a number of characteristics, and are far more similar than they appear at first glance. As a Protestant museum, the MIR tells the story of a protest. Mamco has a similar aim, in that contemporary art can also be seen as a form of protest. At the very least, it represents a change of paradigm in our understanding of what a work of art is.

Another parallel between the two institutions is the concept of the word, which is central to the idea of the Reformation. While the Reformation focused on the word, Mamco, more than in many other museums, emphasizes the importance of words. We believe that art also consists in books, texts, and the thought process involved in creating it. Those parallel thought processes, expressed in works and words, is how contemporary art is meant to be experienced at Mamco.” *David Lemaire, Curator of Mamco and exhibition curator*



The exhibition *The Sky Before Us* examines sacred architecture through the lens of four contemporary photographers. What do these artists see in these very different buildings? Beyond their aesthetic qualities, they serve as a reflection of the current state of the world and its contrasting ideologies, in a word, as a “a true source of everyday life”, as Madame Rosa says in Romain Gary’s novel *The Life Before Us*. **David Spero**’s photographs of suburban London churches document the way in which piety adapts to harsh circumstances; the mundane, sometimes incongruous, buildings where these churches are located echo the exile of the communities that gather there. The Geneva artist **Angèle Laissue** explores the history of a similar exodus, that of the French Protestants who gathered in secret to worship in “desert assemblies” following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). Her portfolio of images uncovers the faint traces of those clandestine celebrations. Traces are also central to the work of the German photographer **Christof Klute**: the impossible trace of a divine

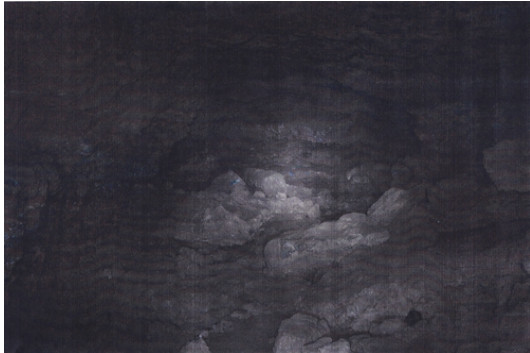
presence on the photographic film, the intangible trace left by the architect on the building he or she designed. Finally, in stark contrast to the austere modernism of Klute's churches, Lausanne-based **Cyril Porchet** trains his gaze on exuberantly gilt baroque altarpieces. Through an effect of flattening, his photographs emphasizes the bewildering richness of detail in the architecture, while simultaneously depriving it of its overbearing weight, thereby revealing its true function as an expression of power. From sumptuous excess to pared-down simplicity, from the Counter-Reformation to Postmodernism, these diverse places of worship share a profound connection to the fundamental purpose of sacred architecture: "to single out a finite space which protects us against the infinite." (Paul Tillich).



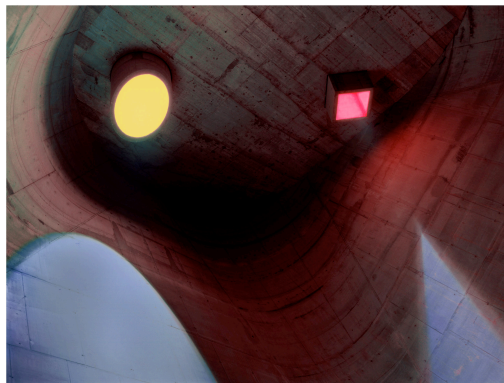
TEMPORARY EXHIBITION TEAM

Exhibition curator	David Lemaire
Curators	Samantha Reichenbach and Simona Sala
Directors	Isabelle Graesslé (MIR) and Christian Bernard (Mamco)
Works on loan	Private collections ; Banque cantonale vaudoise art collection ; Angèle Laissue ; Christof Klute ; Cyril Porchet ; David Spero.
	The exhibition is sustained by the <i>Fonds cantonal d'art contemporain, DIP, Geneva.</i>

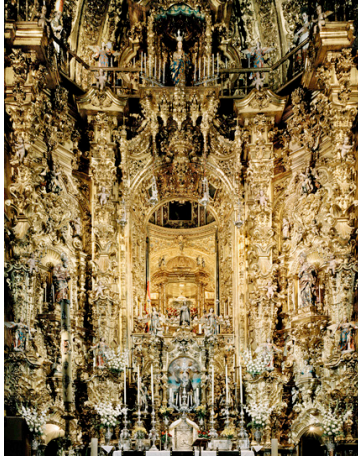
2. Artist profiles



ANGELE LAISSUE (Courgenay, 1977), uses photography to explore disputed or problematic cultural artefacts. Her work has been exhibited at Centre de la Photographie and Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva, Villa du Parc in Annemasse, and Centre Photographique d'Île de France, near Paris. She was the recipient of residency fellowships in New York, in 2013, and Paris, in 2010 and 2011.



CHRISTOF KLUTE was born in Münster, in 1966. After studying theology and then philosophy at the universities of Munster and Cologne, he attended the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf, where he studied with Bernd Becher and Thomas Ruff. Since 2002, his work has focused on modernist utopias in architecture and explored places connected with famous philosophers. He lives and works in Cologne.



CYRIL PORCHET was born in Geneva in 1984. HE began studying photography in 2005 at ECAL in Lausanne, and obtained a bachelor in visual communication and photography in 2009 and a master in art direction in 2011. His work has been exhibited in various museums and galleries, including Maison Européenne de la Photographie (MEP) in Paris and Museum für Gestaltung in Zurich. It also features in several private collections, including that of the art dealer and collector Larry Gagosian. Cyril Porchet lives and works in Lausanne, Switzerland.



DAVID SPERO graduated from the Royal College of Art with an MA in photography in 1993 and has since worked on a number of inter-connected bodies of work. He published *Churches* in 2007 with Steidl. It was shown at The National Media Museum in Bradford in 2011. His on-going work, *Settlements*, a survey of self-built homes in ecological communities, was shown at the Photographers Gallery London in 2006 and was included in *How we are: Photographing Britain* at Tate Britain in 2007. He was the recipient of an Arts Council International Fellowship in Oulu, Finland in 2007 and was the inaugural PhotoWorks Fellow at The British School of Rome in 2009. His work is in various collections including the British Council, The National Media Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

3. Selection of visuals

Christof Klute – Sarnen Series I



David Spero – New Wine Church, Gateway, Woolwich 2004 /
Truth of God Church, Bermondsey 2004



Cyril Porchet – Seduction Series N 5/5_private collection



Angèle Laissue – The Baumelle cave where soldiers, probably following a denunciation, uncovered a secret assembly on the night of 26 to 27 December 1688



4. The MIR is celebrating its 10th anniversary!



15 April 2005 – 15 April 2015 : Memories from the past 10 years
Isabelle Graesslé, 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.

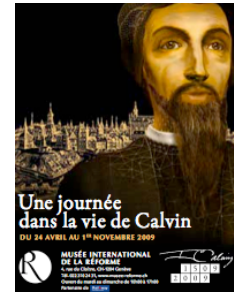
I remember the many **gifts and loans that have enriched our permanent collection**, including a pastel by Liotard and a portrait of Luther by Lucas Cranach the Elder.

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
 4, rue de la Calotte, 1201 Genève, CH
 Ouvert de mardi au dimanche de 10h30 à 17h00
 Tél. 022 310 14 14, www.musee-reforme.ch





On Saturday 18 April from 2 pm to 6 pm, the MIR invites the people of Geneva and visitors to Calvin's city to join it in celebrating its 10th anniversary.

During the afternoon, the MIR will organise a series of activities in various locations in the old town, including Rue du Cloître, Bourg-de-Four, Promenade de la Treille and Place de la Madeleine, where visitors of all ages can compete to win prizes!

On Rue du Cloître, *Le Fix café* food truck will serve free refreshments and snacks to visitors joining us to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the MIR, the museum at the historical and geographical heart of old Geneva.

Admission to the MIR will be free all day on Saturday 18 April.

VOUS N'ALLEZ PAS LE CROIRE...

LE MUSÉE INTERNATIONAL
DE LA RÉFORME FÊTE SES 10 ANS



5. Practical information

MIR (International Museum of the Reformation)

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1204 Geneva

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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.-

10 years anniversary fee : free for 10 years old children

Combined ticket « Espace Saint-Pierre »:

- the MIR

- the Cathedral and the towers

- the Archeological site

Adults : CHF 18.-

Concession : CHF 12.- and CHF 10.-

The MIR: a private institution

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

6. The MIR in brief



The **MIR (International Museum of the Reformation)** was founded in 2005 with the aim of showcasing the history of Geneva and Of the Reformation. As such, it tells the story of both an idea and an ambition.

In the 16th century, John Calvin set out to turn Geneva into a model for a new way of living the Christian life, to serve as an example to the world. This momentum gave birth to the "myth" of Geneva and explains its international influence.

The aim of the MIR is not to convert visitors, but rather to present the history of the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther, John Calvin and many others. Through objects, books, manuscripts, paintings, engravings and state-of-the-art audiovisuals, the museum tells the story of the movement that spread from Geneva during in the 16th century and grew into one of the main families of Christian churches.

The MIR is located on Cour Saint-Pierre, in the magnificent Maison Mallet, a historic dwelling built during the 18th century on the former site of the cathedral cloisters where the Reformation was voted in 1536. In combination with the cathedral and its towers, the IMR offers a unique cultural experience in Geneva, known as 'Espace Saint-Pierre'.

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.