



PRESS KIT

MIR

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1. The MIR: a forum for history and dialogue



The **International Museum of the Reformation (MIR)** was founded in to showcase the history of Geneva and of the Reformation. It traces the origins 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 impetus gave rise to the ‘myth’ of Geneva and explains its international reputation.

The aim of the MIR is to present the history of the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther, John Calvin and many others. Through objects, books, manuscripts, paintings, engravings and audiovisual displays, the museum tells the story of the movement that spread from Geneva during 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 MIR offers a unique cultural experience in Geneva, known as ‘Espace Saint-Pierre’.

The Museum’s 12 rooms present a chronological account of the history and impact of the Reformation spanning 500 years, from the 16th to the 21st century, through 620 documents, objects and interactive displays. A manuscript in Luther’s hand, the signature of King Henri IV of France, the minutes of a meeting between Calvin and a group of Geneva pastors, a bible so small it could be hidden in a lady’s chignon, and an original letter from the German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer are just a few of the fascinating artifacts that illustrate the key stages in the spread of Protestantism.

In April 2007, the MIR was awarded the **Council of Europe Museum Prize**.

2. The Maison Mallet and the Historical site “Espace Saint-Pierre”

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 through its collections and exhibitions, 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 of the Huguenot cross by jeweller Gilbert Albert graces the charming courtyard fountain.

The museum extends over 400 m² 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 location 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 its 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

On May 21st, 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 Genevese 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. The man who played a key role in shaping this new republic was none other than John Calvin. A refugee from France, he arrived in Geneva in 1536, at the age of 27, where Guillaume Farel, the first person to preach the evangelical doctrine in the city, persuaded him to stay.

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.

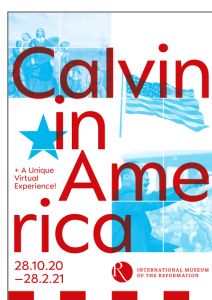
Reformed Geneva remained independent in the face of the territorial ambitions of Savoy – most notably during the attempted invasion of 1602 known as the *Escalade*. The reputation of the city as the capital of Calvinism attracted a new influx of refugees in the late 17th century after the revocation 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



TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

« Calvin in America » (2020-2021)



In November 1620, the passengers and crew of the Mayflower reached the coast of Massachusetts and established a colony there. Among them were Puritan Reformists who had crossed the ocean to found a community in accordance with their aspirations, firmly rooted in Protestant and Calvinist values. This was a founding moment for what was to become the United States of America. Experience first-hand this poignant event and the identity to which it gave rise through a multifaceted exhibition at the MIR: many invaluable historical and artistic items, audio and video clips, films and a virtual crossing of the Atlantic on board the Mayflower.

« Silence, and we're Preaching! » (2020)

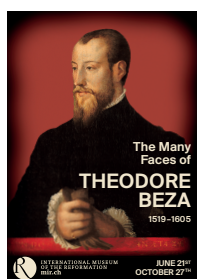
8 Preachers in Film History - 5 Gowns Designed by Albertine



Famous film directors have used Protestant priests as dramatic resources. The MIR broadcasts an original montage composed of eight extracts from famous films.

The exhibition also features five pastor gowns (called “Geneva gowns” in the Reformed tradition) designed by renowned Genevan artist Albertine. Each gown was inspired by a category of pastor defined by French theologian André Gounelle, and expresses the specificities of the pastor’s vocation.

« The Many Faces of Theodore Beza » (2019)



In 2019, the MIR celebrates the 500th anniversary of the birth of this Genevan by adoption and exhibits in its prestigious salon a selection of items that best express his persona.

36 of them introduce Theodore Beza as poet, thinker, pedagogue, diplomat and Calvin's successor.

« Once Upon Many Times » (2019)



Fifteen fantastic stories from the Bible came to life at the MIR thanks to artist Serge Bloch and writer Frédéric Boyer who recreated the poetic world of the founding stories of the Old Testament. Set up in the permanent exhibition of the MIR, screens on one, two or three walls are installed from one room to another, highlighted by frescos, drawings and texts that are both aesthetic and educational. Visitors were immersed in a living and colourful universe by two masters of words and images.

“Unusual 18th Century Figures” (2018)



Published between 1723 and 1737, *Religious Ceremonies and Customs of all the Peoples of the World* is a compilation of everything known at the time about the world's religions, heralding the progressive views on tolerance of the Enlightenment. Extending over 3400 pages and seven volumes, of which five were exposed at the MIR, it contains 260 engravings by Jean Frédéric Bernard and Bernard Picart. The MIR is fortunate to own a copy of this remarkable encyclopaedia and was pleased to present a selection of its most unusual images to the public. Visitors were able to print an engraving as a souvenir, using a press modelled on the one invented by Gutenberg and made specifically for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

“PRINT! The first pages of a revolution” (2017)



The exhibition explored the historical significance of the invention of printing, the greatest revolution since the invention of writing 5000 years ago and before the digital revolution of today. Over 130 days, from June 4th to October 31st 2017, an entire Bible has been hand-printed using period techniques, on a three-meter high replica of a Gutenberg press built especially for the exhibition. The text of the anniversary Bible was the Bayard translation from 2001, a recent French version jointly translated by a group of biblical scholars and famous writers. Four well-known contemporary artists as well as famous writers and personalities participated in the printing of this 800-page anniversary Bible.

“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 historiographic approach. The works on display, by four 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)



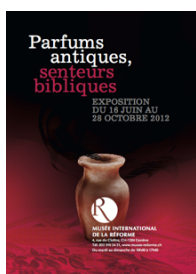
As part of a series of events commemorating the bicentenary of Geneva's admission into the Swiss Confederation, the MIR presented a selection of caricatures by the famous painter Adam Töpffer, in which he attacked the politicians who played an active role in the Restoration of Geneva and its incorporation into Switzerland. The 40 watercolours featured in the temporary exhibition, which took place from October 2014 to February 2015, were on loan from the Musée 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. Later on, during the Religious Wars, many engravings, flyers, medals or other objects displayed 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)



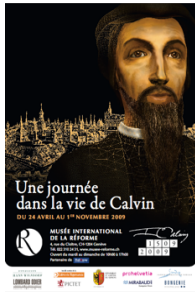
The Bible is full of odorous stories...While such descriptions of fragrant leaves, resins, barks and trees may seem trivial at first sight, they actually provide us with crucial information on their essential and relevant functions. That is why, for its third temporary exhibition, the MIR decided to put perfume in the picture! From June to October 2012, “Ancient Perfumes, Biblical Scents”, allowed 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 across five continents to meet forty individuals named Calvin. In front of the camera, 8 women and 32 men, aged 9 to 79, revealed their personalities as modern-day Calvins. While most of them feel no direct connection to the great reformer, they have all in their own way expressed a rich sense of identity. Originally published in book form by Labor et Fides in 2009, Righetti and Grosjean's work was the focal point of a temporary exhibition at the MIR from June to September 2011, two years after the book's launch.

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



On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of John Calvin’s birth (1509–2009), the MIR offered from April to November 2009 a virtual interpretation of the world of the Reformation, based on collaborative work with the laboratory of Professor Nadia Thalmann, MIRALab from UNIGE. The exhibition "A day in the life of Calvin" evoked the main occupations of the theologian, from his awakening at 4 am to his going to bed at 9 pm, through worship services at Saint-Pierre, a stormy session in the Consistory or a decisive interview between him and Michel Servet. The exhibition recreated the voice of Calvin, his friends, his opponents, as well as the soundscape of Geneva in the 16th century. Visitors could also discover a lively and talking three-dimensional Calvin, surrounded by familiar sets of the time, restored using the techniques of the laboratory MIRALab.

5. The MIR in brief

- A prestigious location in the **Maison Mallet**, 4 rue du Cloître, 1204 Geneva.
- Almost **400 m²** 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 MIR, Saint-Pierre Cathedral and its towers, and the archaeological site constitute a coherent combined attraction for visitors.
- **14 rooms**, plus a museum shop.
- Over **650 original objects** on display: paintings, engravings, books, manuscripts, medals and other artefacts.
- **5 interactive displays**
- **2 audiovisual displays, including “The Reformation in Seven Minutes”,** a short film directed especially for the MIR by Arte TV channel Studio.
- **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**
- An activity for children called **“The MIR superheroes”** with **SuperTheo, SuperCalvin, SuperJohn et SuperFarel** and downloadable **teaching kits** on mir.ch
- **An 750-strong association of 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.

6. Information

International Museum of the Reformation (MIR)

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- 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 guides in French, German and English
- Guided tours in several languages on prior reservation
- Free admission for persons with limited mobility

MIR admission:

Adults: CHF 13.00

Reduced rate: CHF 8.00 and CHF 6.00

Combined ticket « Espace Saint-Pierre »:

- the MIR
- the Cathedral and the towers
- the Archeological site

Adults: CHF 18.00

Reduced rate: CHF 12.00 and CHF 10.00

A selection of free images is available on mir.ch