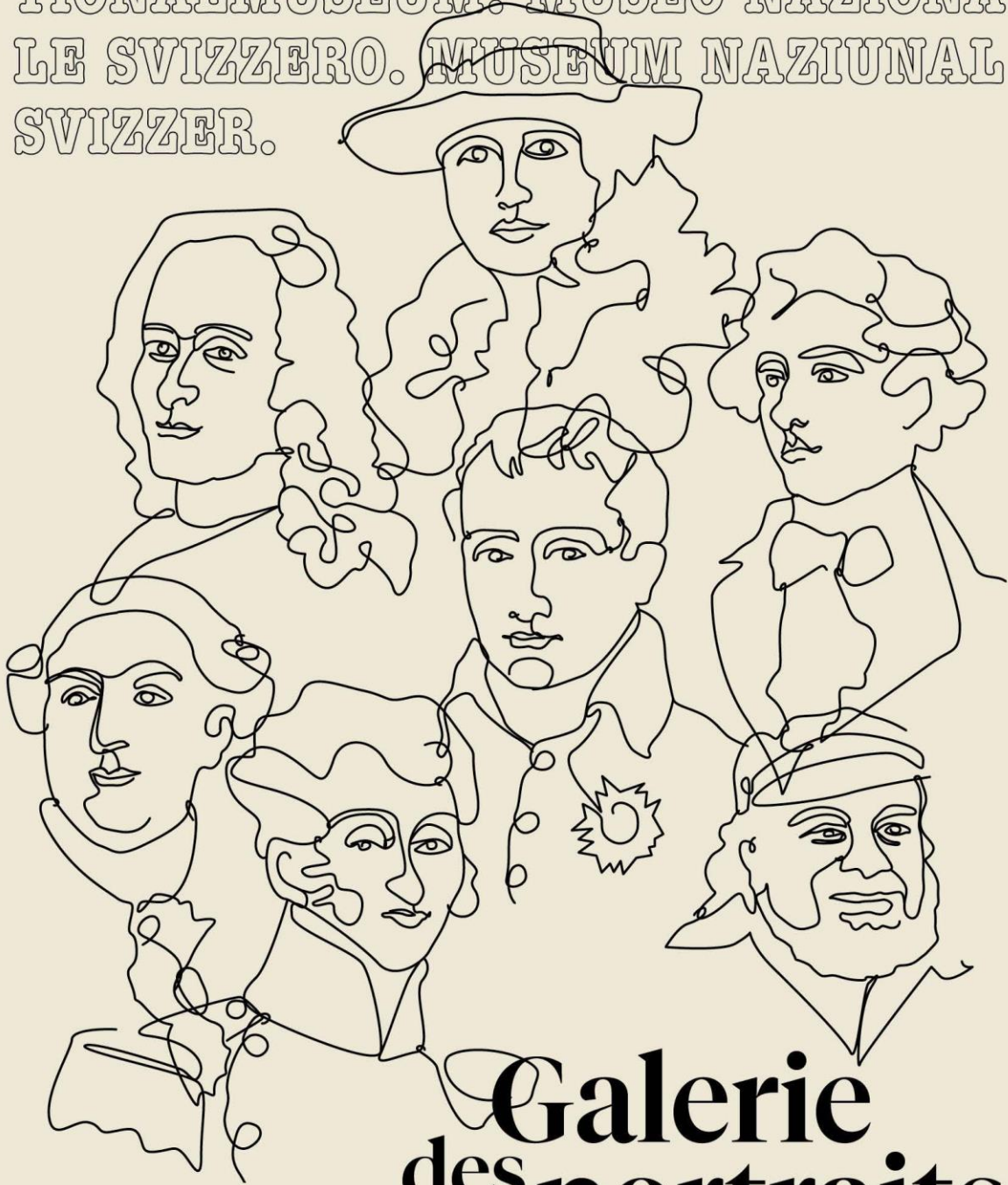


Château de Prangins. MUSÉE NATIONAL SUISSE. SCHWEIZERISCHES NATIONALMUSEUM. MUSEO NAZIONALE SVIZZERO. MUSEUM NAZIUNAL SVIZZER.



Galerie des portraits



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Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern EDI
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Introduction

Historically, the gallery of a stately home served to link the various wings together and act as a transition between different spaces. Often sizeable, it became somewhere to stretch one's legs or walk around when the weather was bad. Since it was an area that everybody had to pass through, it was frequently used to hang family portraits for all to gaze at. Those two functions served as the inspiration for the new permanent exhibition *Portrait gallery*. Bringing together various individuals from the past, the presentation also sets out to recreate the château's sense of place or its soul, which is shaped by all those who lived, wrote, dreamed, wept, studied or collected there.

The exhibition has been designed by *atelier oï*. It includes a number of sound, animation and light features created by interactive media design specialists *Mouvement Studio*.

The eight personalities who appear in *Portrait gallery* are William Beckford, Joseph Bonaparte, Bernie Cornfeld, Charles-Jules Guiguer, Katharine McCormick, the Moravian Brethren, Jacques Necker and Voltaire.

William Beckford (1760–1844)

William Thomas Beckford was a British art critic, collector, politician and writer. At the age of 10, he inherited a vast fortune from his father, the mayor of London, along with lands and sugar plantations in Jamaica. On 1 November 1777, aged 17, Beckford makes his first visit to Château de Prangins accompanied by his guardian, Edward Hamilton, who is tasked with looking after him during the four years in which he remains a minor. Over a ten-month period, the young man is a frequent visitor to Château de Prangins and its society, staying there for two or three days a month. Once he reaches adulthood he travels widely in Europe, fleeing Britain where his reputation as an eccentric and libertine holds back his political career. His luxurious lifestyle astonishes his contemporaries. In 1786, he creates his most famous work, the Gothic novel *Vathek*, which is written in French and published in Lausanne. His name will forever be associated with Fonthill Abbey, a large, Gothic Revival country house resembling a cathedral where he lives as a recluse.

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Joseph Bonaparte (1768–1844)

The life of Joseph Bonaparte is marked by a dazzling rise through the ranks of society and politics alongside his famous younger brother, the Emperor Napoleon. A skilled politician and diplomat, he occupies key positions in the imperial administration, being successively endowed by the Emperor with the titles of King of Naples (in 1806), then King of Spain (in 1808), though he holds them only for a brief period.

Forced to leave France in 1814 after Napoleon is defeated and banished into exile, Joseph takes refuge in Switzerland. Following an unsuccessful attempt to purchase Château d'Allaman, he contacts Charles-Jules Guiguer, Baron of Prangins, from whom he purchases the estate in July 1814. Joseph's presence at Prangins has not gone unnoticed and has even given rise to gossip, rumours and discontent in the region. In March 1815, Napoleon's dramatic return march from exile to Paris prompts Joseph to leave Prangins. It is said that the Vaud and Swiss authorities had at that very moment been instructed by the Austrians to arrest him. In any event, Joseph leaves the château as a result. Prior to his departure, he is said to have buried a "treasure chest" somewhere on the estate: a box containing important documents along with precious stones valued at five million francs. The latter were allegedly recovered some years later by his secretary.

Bernard Cornfeld (1927–1995)

Bernard, known as Bernie, Cornfeld is the château's last private owner, between 1970 and 1973. His reasons for buying it are unclear. Although he never lived there, witnesses from the time claim that he held spectacular parties within its walls. Scarcely three weeks after acquiring it, Cornfeld is embroiled in a scandal that catapults French-speaking Switzerland into the international headlines. The founder of the mutual fund Investors Overseas Services (IOS), he oversees the collapse of his Geneva-based financial empire. He is accused of defrauding hundreds of thousands of small savers. After a brief period of imprisonment followed by an investigation lasting eight years, he is acquitted by a court in Geneva. Was he the crook of the century or an unjustly punished financial hero? The affair still divides public opinion.

Charles-Jules Guiguer (1780–1840)

Charles-Jules Guiguer is born at Château de Prangins in August 1780. The eldest son of Matilda and Louis-François Guiguer, he inherits the title of baron of Prangins and will be the last to bear it. At the age of 15, he goes to Germany to study. Returning to Prangins in 1798, he takes part in the liberation of the Vaud, accompanied by his younger brother Auguste. During a long military career, he is appointed a federal colonel and colonel of the Vaud carabineers in 1805. That same year he marries a young woman from London, Marie-Françoise Hazard; they go on to have six children. Alongside his military career, Charles-Jules is heavily involved in politics, becoming a member of the Vaud Grand Council in 1814

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and also sitting in its Council of State and Diet. During this period, he will experience first hand all the political upheavals of the era. Seven years before his retirement from politics, in 1830, he is promoted to commander in chief of the federal army. General Guiguer de Prangins dies on 7 July 1840 at his estate of La Chablière, near Lausanne, having sold Château de Prangins to Joseph Bonaparte in July 1814, probably for financial reasons.

Katharine McCormick (1875–1967)

Katharine McCormick is an American biologist, feminist and philanthropist. Born in Michigan, she is one of the first women to attend MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), obtaining a degree in biology. She is an active supporter of the feminist cause, serving in particular as the treasurer and vice-president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. In the 1920s, she secretly brings diaphragms back from Europe, where selling them is legal, to America. She works with Margaret Sanger, who is responsible for opening the first birth control clinic in the United States. In 1947, having received a substantial inheritance from her husband, she funds the research by Dr Gregory Pincus which leads to the creation of the contraceptive pill. Sold in the US from 1957 onwards, this revolutionary means of conception first appears on the European market in 1961. Katharine owns Château de Prangins from 1929 to 1962, and spends her summers there on vacation. In 1962 she bequeaths the fully furnished château to the US government which, despite holding on to it until 1970, never actually makes use of it.

The Moravian Brethren (1873–1920)

The Moravian Brethren are a Christian community originally from Bohemia. From 1739 onwards, Moravian groups are established in German-speaking Switzerland. They meet with a friendly reception among many in Protestant circles. An institute for girls is established in Montmirail in 1766, another for boys in Lausanne in 1837. The latter's success compels it to look for a larger home. So, in 1873, it moves to Château de Prangins, remaining there until 1920. The Moravians' priorities are communal life, Bible reading, the evangelical mission and teaching.

Some 80 people live permanently at the château: the headmaster and his family, the teachers, the staff (chambermaids, gardeners, etc.) and some 50 boarders. The building undergoes profound changes to accommodate them. The salon becomes a prayer room while the upper storeys are arranged into dormitories, classrooms and studies. Electricity is installed in around 1900, followed in around 1913 by central heating and the telephone.

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Jacques Necker (1732–1804)

Jacques Necker is a banker from Geneva who accumulated a considerable personal fortune in Paris and is famous for serving as Louis XVI's finance minister. First appointed to the post in November 1776, he implements a rigorous economic policy, reducing the crown's expenditure and imposing structural reforms to the way the royal finances are administered. While highly popular among the general public, he is much less admired by conservative circles at Versailles, and that animosity forces him to resign in 1781. However, faced with the threat of bankruptcy, Louis XVI recalls Necker in August 1788. On 5 May 1789 Necker opens the assembly of the Estates General, comprising the clergy, the nobility and the Third Estate. He finally steps down in 1790.

Between 1781 and 1788, Jacques Necker returns to the Lake Geneva region, notably acquiring Château de Coppet in 1784. During this period he pays a number of visits to his friend Louis-François Guiguer, Baron of Prangins. The latter's journal records these events, mentioning for example a visit to Prangins by Jacques Necker, his wife and daughter, on 27 September 1783. Louis-François Guiguer also reads all Necker's publications.

Voltaire (1694–1778)

Voltaire spends three months at Château de Prangins during winter 1754–1755 at the invitation of Baron Jean-Georges Guiguer, who has recently acquired the estate. The philosopher is introduced to the baron by his two nieces, Mme de Fontaine and Mme Denis, both of whom are long-standing friends of Jean-Georges. Mme Denis accompanies him on this visit. Voltaire has been forced to leave the Prussian court after being disgraced. No longer welcome at the court of the French king, he sets his sights instead upon Switzerland, especially the Geneva region and its environs. His sojourn at Prangins gives him the opportunity to find a new place to live. He finally chooses a house in the Geneva countryside which he renames "Les Délices", acquiring it in March 1755.

Voltaire's time at the château is documented in his extensive correspondence and that of his niece. They tell us that the building is still to be properly furnished, the new baron having not yet moved in. While heaping praise on the property, even calling it "a house fit for a prince", Voltaire suffers from the cold and draughts during the winter. Among his noteworthy comments on the château, there are references to the garden, which he compares with that of Les Délices, his new house in the canton of Geneva, declaring the latter's superiority on two occasions ("I unquestionably have a finer garden"; "Château de Prangins is welcome to its garden").