

Château de Prangins.

“Noblesse oblige ! Life at a château in the 18th century”

From 23 March 2013

New permanent exhibition in Musée national suisse – Château de Prangins

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From 23 March 2013

Press release

Embargo: 14.03.2013 | 12.00

Château de Prangins is bringing its past to life and showcasing its historical heritage. From 23 March 2013 the former reception rooms, comprising the salon, dining rooms and libraries, will be revealed in their original grandeur as the backdrop for the new permanent exhibition devoted to the everyday life of a noble family in the Vaud region at the end of the 18th century. The exhibition explores important issues of cultural history such as wealth and property, family life, lighting and heating, household staff and access to knowledge.

“Noblesse oblige! Life at a château in the 18th century” invites visitors to immerse themselves in both a period – the end of the Ancien Régime – and a story: that of the Guiguer family and their entourage. Through an examination of the lifestyle of the nobility, the exhibition sheds light on the cultural and social practices of an era.

Built at the start of the Enlightenment for Louis Guiguer, a prosperous financier of Swiss origin who is elevated to the nobility through his purchase of the baronial estate, Château de Prangins – an imposing building overlooking Lake Geneva – symbolises a successful ascent into the higher echelons of society. This is reflected in the four corner towers, the central courtyard and the arrangement of the apartments in a straight line known as an enfilade, making it possible to gauge the size of the château – and hence the wealth of its owner – at a single glance. This same enfilade, which serves as a suite of reception rooms, is home to the new permanent exhibition.

Daily life on a baronial estate

The exhibition offers an insight into the life of a baron and the way in which he manages his estate, his duties and obligations, his family and social life, and his principal interests. Each of the nine rooms is devoted to a specific topic that mirrors its original function: hospitality in the salon, servants in the butler’s pantry and private writing in the study.

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The baron's journal

The best-known period in the building's history coincides with the presence of Baron Louis-François Guiguer, the grandnephew of Louis. From his arrival in 1771 to his death in 1786, he keeps a journal in which he records episodes from his daily life and details the preoccupations of an enlightened gentleman and family father. The exhibition has been designed around this exceptional historical record. The journal acts as a thread running through the tour: a quotation from it introduces the topic for each room, while extracts examine it in more detail.

Recreation of a historical interior

In 1787, one month after Louis-François Guiguer dies leaving three young children and a pregnant widow, a notary draws up an inventory of his assets. It lists, room by room, all the furniture, paintings, engravings, items of tableware and silverware, mirrors, musical instruments and other objects that belonged to the baron, almost all of which have been dispersed over time. The only surviving document to record these details, the inventory served as the framework for our recreation of the appearance of the reception rooms at Château de Prangins.

A team of exhibition designers and architects worked on every aspect of the architectural backdrop: ceilings, parquet floors, skirting boards and walls. The boiseries have been restored to their original colours with the help of surveys carried out in the 1980s and 1990s. A false-marble decoration was recreated using a surviving fragment of the original.

One important aspect of the décor is the textiles: the 1787 inventory contains precise details of the wall coverings and curtains that were in place at the time of Baron Louis-François Guiguer. Great care has been taken in selecting these fabrics and their designs, and in imitating as faithfully as possible the weaving and fitting techniques of the 18th century.

Extensive research in the extensive collections of furniture and decorative arts belonging to the Swiss National Museum has unearthed more than 600 objects from the time that have now been brought together here. Furniture made from precious woods, chandeliers and mirrors, porcelain tableware from China and Nyon, books, paintings, drawings and engravings, transport visitors into the world of luxury and refinement so beloved of the Enlightenment.

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Highlights of the new permanent exhibition:

- Château de Prangins has been spectacularly transformed, with sumptuous interiors returned to their former glory.
- The new permanent exhibition presents numerous facets of daily life in the Enlightenment: managing an estate, relations between masters and servants, marriage, the art of receiving guests, reading and writing, and so on. The rich variety of topics examined is enough to satisfy the most knowledge-hungry of visitors.
- The voices of the château's former inhabitants will be heard once again: thanks to specially produced new films, a lively audioguide and poetic animations throughout the tour, visitors can become, for a brief time, guests of the baron embarking on a journey back into the 18th century.
- There is also a fun audioguide for children, enabling them to listen in on conversations between some of the objects on display and so find out more about the lives of people living in the château. An activity booklet is also available.
- The exhibition and the audioguide (for adults and children) are available in four languages: French, English, German and Italian.

Visuals

Full media documentation and a selection of photographs are available for download from the "Press" section of the website www.chateaudeprangins.ch.

Contacts

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Tour of the exhibition

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The exhibition is housed in eleven rooms on the ground floor of the château. It is introduced by a short film. Amid a mysterious atmosphere of light and shade, visitors encounter Baron Louis-François Guiguer, played by Jean-Luc Borgeat. An entertaining and informative audioguide featuring the voices of the château’s inhabitants – its governor, the baroness or one of the servants – then takes them from room to room, allowing them to share the joys and sorrows of the château’s inhabitants and their thoughts on the society of their time: the baron’s pride as he speaks of his ancestors or his books, the excitement of his wife Matilda putting on a play, the hectic comings and goings of servants preparing for a big party.

Antechamber

A map on the floor reveals the full extent of the Prangins estate, while visitors find out about the thousand and one tasks that occupy the lord of such a vast property. There are encounters with the governor, the baron’s right-hand man, who illuminates the historical context of the era: at the time, the Vaud is a province of the Republic of Bern and the lord of Prangins is accountable to the bailiff of Nyon, a Bernese magistrate charged with overseeing the region.

Large staircase

At the foot of the staircase leading to the winter apartments, an interactive model teaches visitors about the organisation of activities inside the château. There are a range of devices for children to learn what the eight doors are for and drive a carriage around the courtyard. The French-style architecture of the château is discussed and compared with other examples in the region.

Butler’s pantry

In this strategic location, with access to the kitchens, cellars and the two dining rooms, visitors meet the fifteen-or-so servants employed at the château to help the baron maintain his grand lifestyle. There is also a memory game in which visitors young and old can link various objects to the different types of servant.

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Small dining room

Reserved for family meals, this small room marks the start of the suite of reception rooms. Here visitors meet Matilda, Baron Louis-François Guiguer's English wife, and find out about family life in the 18th century. There's also a look at the Grand Tour, a journey of education and initiation for the elites; and tea – the exotic drink par excellence.

Large dining room

A magnificently laid table introduces visitors to the art of dining in the 18th century, while a dresser filled with China porcelain evokes the astonishing commercial success of the East India Companies. Silhouettes of dancers and a small theatre recall that this room was not merely a place for parties but also a venue for balls, concerts and stage productions.

Salon

The perfect reception room, the salon is home to a large number of precious objects: silk damasks on the wall, a sparkling chandelier, precious furniture, gilded frames and large mirrors reflect the distinction that the rank of baron confers. Brought together for the first time since the end of the 18th century, the portraits of three generations of Guiguer de Prangins barons serve as a family tree. The room can also be darkened to illustrate the various ways of producing light at the time.

Marble hallway

Acting as a thoroughfare, the hallway provides access to the terrace, with its incomparable view of Lake Geneva and the Alps. In the 18th century, Switzerland and its picturesque landscapes attract ever-increasing numbers of tourists, as the engravings by masters such as Aberli and Mehel confirm.

Using multimedia terminals, visitors can follow the various stages in the recreation of the 18th-century décor.

Study

In the 18th century, writing is the only way for people who are separated to keep in touch, as attested by the beautiful letters sent from Russia to Château de Prangins. The upper classes often spend several hours a day dealing with their correspondence. Over a fifteen-year period, Louis-François Guiguer also keeps a journal for those around him. A facsimile is on display in the room, while the audioguide contains selected extracts from this exceptional historical document,

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which runs to over a thousand pages.

Library

The exclusive preserve of the elite, libraries are prestigious places, and this is reflected in their furnishings and decoration. The majority of the books housed here were read by Louis-François Guiguer; we know about his reading habits from his journal. Bestsellers of 18th-century literature such as the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert and Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* take pride of place, alongside works of science and history, plays and collections of poems.

The exhibition ends with a film recounting events following the death of Louis-François Guiguer in 1786, three years before the French Revolution. His widow, who outlives him by many years, tells of the fall of the Ancien Régime and the emergence of a new form of society.

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Visiting the exhibition

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Thanks to specially produced films, audioguides, booklets and animations, visitors become, for an hour or two, guests of the baron and his family for a charming and fascinating exploration of life at a château in days gone by. The various media are available free of charge in four languages: French, English, German and Italian.

Films

The exhibition is introduced by a short film featuring Louis-François Guiguer, played by the actor Jean-Luc Borgeat. The baron discovers his château transformed into a museum, offering visitors a poetic introduction to the exhibition. By way of conclusion, the baron returns at the end of the exhibition in a film recalling the events that followed his death: the French Revolution, the sale of the château to Joseph Bonaparte in 1814, etc.

Audioguide

At the entrance to the exhibition, a lively and entertaining audioguide written by Eugène invites visitors to explore the rooms and immerse themselves in life at a château in the 18th century.

Booklets

Complementing the audioguide tour and introductory texts, booklets on various topics are also available. Copiously illustrated, the texts examine the various topics addressed in each room and analyse in greater depth issues related to the 18th century and the history of the château.

Visiting the exhibition with children

“Noblesse oblige! Life at a château in the 18th century” is also ideally suited to children.

Audioguide for children aged 7 to 12

Eugène has also written an audioguide specially for younger audiences. As they proceed through the rooms, either on their own or accompanied by an adult, the children will encounter objects that come to life and speak – a fun way of finding out about their history and purpose.

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Booklet for families

A booklet for children aged 4 and over is the perfect accompaniment to a visit with the family. It encourages children to observe and discover the exhibition while enjoying themselves at the same time.

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Guided tours

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Throughout the year, Château de Prangins and its cultural education service offer a wide variety of activities. With the opening of the permanent exhibition “Noblesse oblige! Life at a château in the 18th century”, these have been expanded to include new workshops and guided tours for both adults and younger audiences, the majority of which are available in French, English and German.

Guided tours

“Noblesse oblige!” for adults

A general guided tour exploring the new permanent exhibition at Château de Prangins and life at a château in the 18th century.

Exclusive evening guided tour for groups

An original way for groups to discover the new permanent exhibition. Details on the website from 23 March 2013.

“Highlights” for adults | New!

With the opening of the new permanent exhibition, this half-hour guided tour introduces visitors to ten highlights from the collections of the Swiss National Museum, more than a thousand of which are currently on display at Château de Prangins.

“Meal time!” for young visitors (aged 6 and over) and adults | New!

This tour delves into our gastronomic past and reveals the secrets of cooking during the Ancien Régime. As they explore the eating habits of our ancestors, participants learn about 18th-century society and objects from the luxurious and prestigious to the everyday. This tour offers a rich combination of colours, tastes and smells!

“Life in the baron’s time” for young people aged 13 to 17

A fun and interactive guided tour in which participants learn about the world of a château in the 18th century and the daily life of its inhabitants.

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Activities

“Marvellous marble?” for young visitors (aged 4 and over) and adults

Tour and workshop exploring the real and – often – false marbles of Château de Prangins. An introduction to the rich vocabulary of marble as well as the many tones and forms of decoration, plus a chance for participants to try their hand at painting false marble.

“Lend me your pen” for children (aged 7 and over), young people and adults

The tour and workshop for children takes as its starting point the journal of Baron Louis-François Guiguer. It tells the story of writing through a series of lively games and puzzles, then switches from theory to practice as, using quills and reed pens, participants try to match the writing skills of their ancestors – without leaving any smudges!

For young people and adults, things are a little more complicated. Divided into teams, they have to answer questions, identify unfamiliar alphabets and find clues linked to writing in the museum.

“Shadow play, cut-outs and silhouettes” for young visitors (aged 5 and over) and adults

In this workshop, children or adults discover the fascinating history of cut-out silhouettes, a highly prized skill in the 18th century. Viewing the rich collections of the Swiss National Museum in a new light, they then receive an introduction to the art of cutting out with scissors.

“Prints that make an impression” for young visitors (aged 7 and over) and adults

A chance for young participants to discover the mysterious, faraway countries behind prints on various media. Following the tour, there’s a chance to make your own prints using old-fashioned techniques.

During the tour and workshop, adults explore the history of printing and the techniques used in times gone by, featuring everything from wood and plants to sometimes surprising sources of colour. Then they put those techniques into practice and make traditional prints of their own.

The full range of tours is also available for schools. There are two learning packs (for pupils aged 10 to 12 and 13 to 15) aligned with the school curriculum for French-speaking Switzerland.

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The lavishly illustrated, 136-page colour catalogue published by 5 Continents is available in French, English, German and Italian.

“ Noblesse oblige ! Life at a Château in the Eighteenth Century”

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CHF 25.-

Extract of the preface by Nicole Minder, director of Château de Prangins and member of the Executive Committee of the Swiss National Museum

With an estate covering five hectares and including a park and gardens, Château de Prangins is an exceptional place and a popular destination for visitors. A heritage site of outstanding value, it is classified as a historic monument of national importance in the federal inventory of protected buildings in Switzerland (...)

When we set about renewing the permanent exhibitions, we resolved to place this unique architectural ensemble at the centre of our discourse. The process of enhancing the site, including both the château and its lands, was divided into three stages, linked together and proceeding from the outside inwards.

In 2010, we created a learning trail around the exterior of the château which places it in its environmental context, bringing history out from the confines of the building and recounting it where it happened: in the estate itself. Some twenty silhouettes representing individuals linked to Château de Prangins – including Voltaire, Mme de Staël, Joseph Bonaparte and even an anonymous servant fetching water from the fountain, invite visitors to stroll and explore. (...)

The second stage unlocks the secrets of the historical kitchen garden of Château de Prangins. Covering 5,500m² and comprising a living collection of around a hundred traditional varieties of fruits and vegetables, it is the largest of its kind in Switzerland. In 2011, a new interpretation centre opened in the garden's former

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outbuilding, in which visitors of all ages can explore issues of agronomy and botany via an entertaining and interactive presentation spanning both the 18th century and contemporary issues of biodiversity.

The culmination of this ambitious project is the third and most important stage, opening in spring 2013. It involves restoring the décor of the reception rooms on the building's ground floor, enabling visitors to imagine what life was like during the Enlightenment through the experiences of its various inhabitants. It focuses not just on the families of the barons of Prangins, but also on the lifestyle of the elite at the time, combining architecture, cultural history and the decorative arts.

(...)

The project brings the former functions of Château de Prangins to life. Now, the building is not simply the backdrop against which the museum collection is displayed, but rather an exhibit in its own right. Taken together, the buildings, outhouses and green spaces make up a museum environment in which visitors young and old can appreciate the ties between the past and the present and enjoy a range of experiences amid idyllic surroundings. The museum's image has thus been transformed: with its gardens, interiors and exhibitions, it is now a major centre for encounters and entertainments in which nature and culture are as one.

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Issues to explore

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This multifaceted exhibition explores a wide variety of issues related to cultural history, the decorative arts, architecture and the landscape. On request, members of the museum’s scientific staff will be happy to provide more information on any of these topics.

Issues linked to the exhibition “ Noblesse oblige ! Life at a château in the 18th century”

- The daily life of a baron in the Vaud region at the end of the Ancien Régime
- Daily life and servants
- Libraries and knowledge in the century of Enlightenment
- The château and its architecture
- The traditional kitchen garden
- Between nature and culture: the landscape and architecture of the site
- Louis-François Guiguer’s journal and private writing in the 18th century
- Wall coverings, curtains and passementerie: the wonderful world of furnishing fabrics
- Masterpieces from the furniture and decorative arts collections of the Swiss National Museum
- Aberli, Ducros, De la Rive and Brun de Versoix: painters and engravers linked to the Baron of Prangins
- Concept and design of the new exhibition
- Recreating an 18th-century décor
- Lighting and heating in the 18th century

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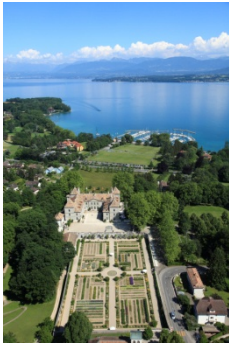
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Visuals

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www.chateaudeprangins.ch under “Press”

or on request to rachel.vez-fridrich@snm.admin.ch, T. + 41 (0)22 994 88 68



Swiss National Museum
Château de Prangins
© Swiss National Museum



Small dining room
© Swiss National Museum



Table laid with a porcelain
service and dresser in the large dining
room
© Swiss National Museum

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The castle's salon and its crimson damask
© Swiss National Museum



Detail of the salon
© Swiss National Museum



The small library
© Swiss National Museum



The large library seen through a pier
glass
© Swiss National Museum

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Extract of the introductory film
© Swiss National Museum



Room relating to the baronial estate
© Swiss National Museum



Enfilade and audioguide
© Swiss National Museum

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Practical information

Diffusion: 14.03.2013 | 12.00

Musée national suisse – Château de Prangins

CH – 1197 Prangins

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www.chateaudeprangins.ch

Opening hours Tuesday - Sunday, 10 am to 5 pm

Preview

Saturday 23 March, 16.15

Open day, music, dance and workshop, admission free

Sunday 24 March, 10.00 – 17.00

Press conference

Thursday 14 March 2013, 11.00, Château de Prangins

Friday 15 March 2013, 11.00, Landesmuseum Zurich

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