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Press Pack
30 October 2018

Gustave Revilliod 1817-1890 A Man Open to the World

Musée Ariana, 2 November 2018 - 2 June 2019

Press visits on request.

Exhibition preview: Thursday 1 November at 7 pm

Musée Ariana
Swiss Museum for Ceramics and Glass
10 Avenue de la Paix
1202 Geneva - Switzerland

Press pack and visuals downloadable
on: www.ariana-geneve.ch

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Fondation Philanthropique
Famille Sandoz

Gustave Revilliod
1817-1890
A Man Open to the World
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Gustave Revilliod
1817-1890
A Man Open to the World
Musée Ariana, 2 November 2018 - 2 June 2019

Context

Geneva, October 2018 – The Musée Ariana, close to the Palace of Nations, enjoys an excellent reputation in Geneva and abroad for its ceramic and glass collections, yet who still remembers its creator, Gustave Revilliod (1817-1890)? Born into an old Genevan family, this cosmopolitan traveller and passionate collector built up an astonishing ensemble of artworks, objects and books whose aim was encyclopaedic. To house them, he commissioned a sumptuous Italianate edifice, named Ariana in memory of his mother, which was intended for all to enjoy. A rare gesture, reminiscent of the contemporaneous one by Émile Guimet in Paris. On his death in Cairo, this great patron's museum and its collections were left to the City of Geneva, along with the immense Varembe estate which surrounded it.

With its paintings, sculptures, timepieces, jewellery, weapons, medals, furniture, ceramics, glass and stained glass, along with curiosities brought back from his round-the-world trip, and not forgetting an imposing library, the collection of over 30,000 pieces assembled by Gustave Revilliod, assisted by his faithful steward and friend Godefroy Sidler, is impressive. It spans periods, continents and techniques. Opened to the public in 1884, the building and its collections were a source of boundless admiration for Revilliod's contemporaries.

In an ambitious project, and with the support of numerous enthusiastic partnerships, the Musée Ariana is paying tribute to this formidable legacy. The exhibition invites visitors to immerse themselves in this evocation of a 19th century museum of Revilliod's day and discover astonishing works retrieved from the storerooms of Geneva's museums

Partner institutions: Musée d'art et d'histoire, Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, Bibliothèque de Genève, Conservatory and Botanical Garden, Muséum d'histoire naturelle and the University of Geneva.

The man and those close to him

Gustave Revilliod's parents, Philippe Revilliod (1786-1864) and Ariane De la Rive (1791-1876) were first cousins. The family fortune, built up over generations, enabled Gustave Revilliod to live off his private income. After studying law and philosophy, Gustave Revilliod continued his education in Berlin. His desire to travel soon led him on journeys across Europe and North Africa. At the same time, he began a collection that would continue to grow over the years. While his father was always more circumspect about his son's passion for works of art, his beloved mother, Ariane Revilliod, gave him constant support and encouragement in his endeavours.

Revilliod's love of the written word resulted in a near thirty year-long collaboration with Fick, the Genevan printers and publishers, making it possible to reprint works that had become unavailable and promote contemporary literature. It was also Fick that published Revilliod's own writings: family memories, poetry and accounts of his travels, adapted mainly from his copious correspondence with family and friends.

During his lifetime, Gustave Revilliod concurrently held public offices and honorary posts. A member of various learned societies connected to art, history and archaeology, he also took a keen interest in the running of his commune of Petit-Saconnex and had a seat on Geneva's Grand Council. In addition, he was a member of the Swiss delegations sent to the Vienna World's Fair and to the opening of the Suez Canal.

One figure was to play a crucial role in Gustave Revilliod's life: Godefroy Sidler (1836-1910). Having entered the Revilliod family's service in 1858 as a mere valet, he rapidly took on a number of different roles: companion to Ariane, steward, supervisor of the Ariana construction site, travel companion, trusted confidant and faithful friend to Gustave. In accordance with Revilliod's wishes, Sidler was, moreover, appointed as the museum's curator on his employer's demise.

Encyclopaedic collections

Gustave Revilliod assembled an encyclopaedic type of collection, being fascinated by practically everything: ceramics, tapestry, gold and silver work, timepieces, weapons, furniture, painting, sculpture, glass, stained glass, etc. He aimed more at a systematic documentation of all human artistic expression rather than merely hunting for masterpieces. In addition to regular purchases from a few favoured dealers, he also acquired pieces during visits to national exhibitions and world's fairs or in the course of his many travels. He was interested in both historical works as well as those reflecting the artistic disciplines of his day. Though Revilliod's ambitions extended beyond the borders of his own small country, he was nevertheless keen to exhibit the very best of Swiss artistic production.

Revilliod had an evident fascination with the East, which was amply reflected in his museum's Chinese and Japanese rooms. Given the size of the building, the collector unsparingly purchased monumental pieces (immense vases or furniture), guaranteed to impress visitors.

Journeys encountering others

Gustave Revilliod's taste for the Orient is well-known. His first voyages in Europe and to Algiers were followed by a memorable stay in Egypt, which he would visit four times more. In 1888-1889, already advanced in years, he travelled to more distant countries on his round-the-world journey. In his letters, he recounts his impressions of India, Ceylon, China and Japan.

As well as aiming to discover historic masterpieces, Revilliod's interests prompted him to seek out encounters with others, readily leaving official delegations in order to visit a hammam or listen to street musicians. Equally, he missed no opportunity to acquire objects, filling whole crates with them that he sent back to the Ariana.

The Ariana's sumptuous architecture

As the mansion at 12 Rue de l'Hôtel de Ville eventually proved too small to house Revilliod's collection and to receive the visitors wishing to admire it, he devised a plan to build his own museum. He commissioned the architect Émile Grobéty (1844-1906) and took him on a study trip to Italy to design the future museum in an eclectic Renaissance Revival and Baroque Revival style influenced predominantly by Italian palatial architecture. Jacques-Élysée Goss (1839-1921) subsequently pursued the construction of the new building.

With its twisted marble columns, its ironwork, the starry vault of its elliptical dome and its rich mythological and allegorical painted and carved decor, the Ariana's architecture is astonishing within Protestant Geneva. The splendid, double flight grand staircase initially planned was, however, never built. The partly-completed museum opened to the public in 1884. It was named Ariana in memory of its founder's beloved mother, Ariane De la Rive. The museum was bequeathed to the City of Geneva, along with its collections and the park that surrounded it, in 1890.

An evocation of 19th century museography

It is clearly not a question in this exhibition of faithfully recreating the Ariana as it was presented to the public in the late 19th century! Through a modern exhibition design and loans from the museums and libraries holding the Revilliod collections, the aim is to showcase the incredible richness of this heritage and its importance for Geneva.

The presentation conjures up the profusion and extravagance of the world's fairs, the fascination with the East, as well as European art and Revilliod's patriotic attachment to Geneva and Switzerland. The juxtaposition of works of all techniques and periods, often unknown to the general public, proves captivating; an evocation of the man himself, an inquiring and engaging humanist and scholar, is not forgotten.

A milestone publication

A publication of around 480 pages, containing articles by 32 researchers, specialists and curators of the different collections, this reference work deals with Revilliod the man, his family, his commitment to society and his many journeys, in addition to his collections and the museum's astonishing architecture. This book, which often reads like a novel, reflects the current state of research carried out by a remarkable panel of contributors.

Danielle Buysens, Isabelle Naef Galuba, Barbara Roth Lochner (dir.), *Gustave Revilliod (1817-1890), un homme ouvert au monde*, Musée Ariana, Geneva, 5 Continents Editions, Milan, 2018, ISBN 978-88-7439-825-6, 93 CHF

Some important dates

1817

Birth on 8 April of Gustave Revilliod, 3rd son (after Horace and Charles) of Philippe Revilliod (1786-1864) and Ariane De la Rive (1791-1876).

1844-1845

Travels to Algiers. First contacts with the East.

1853

Beginning of his collaboration with Fick printers and publishers.

1858

Deaths of his two brothers, Horace and Charles, a few weeks apart.
Godefroy Sidler, aged 22, enters the service of Gustave Revilliod and his family.

1866

Revilliod begins to welcome art lovers to the museum he has set up in the family home at 12 Rue de l'Hotel-de-Ville.

1869

First stay in Egypt. Revilliod is one of three delegates representing the Swiss Confederation at the opening of the Suez Canal.

1873

Delegate to the Vienna World's Fair for the Swiss Federal Council and jury member for the metalwork section.

1876

Death of his mother, Ariane Revilliod-De la Rive. Revilliod decides to construct a museum, which he will name Ariana in her memory.

1884

The Musée Ariana, still unfinished, opens to the public.

1888-1889

Travels around the world with Dr. Ernest Gaudard. They stay in Egypt, India, Ceylon, Saigon, China and Japan and return via the United States.

1890

Revilliod journeys again to Egypt, where he dies on 21 December. He bequeaths the Varembe estate, the Ariana and its collections, the building on the Rue de l'Hotel-de-Ville and a portfolio of securities to the City of Geneva.

EVENTS

Guided Tours

Sundays 4 November & 2 December 2018; 3 February, 7 April, 19 May (for International Museum Day) & 2 June 2019 at 11 am

Guided Tour for Teachers

Wednesday 7 November 2018, 2 pm - 3 pm

Cobalt Pyrim, a role-playing mystery game at the Ariana

A mysterious and inexplicable time rift has appeared at the Musée Ariana. Become detectives of the strange and join in an amazing experience.

Thursday 8 November 2018, 8 pm – 10 pm

Prior booking required, cost 20 CHF

Thematic Tours: Gustave's passions

Sundays at 11 am (in French):

11 November 2018: *At the heart of Revilliod's collection, from books to paintings*

27 January 2019: *The Splendour of the World's Fairs*

3 March 2019: *Revilliod and Fascination with the East*

5 May 2019: *The Musée Ariana, the Heritage of a Museum and its Grounds*

Guided Tours in English

Sundays 10 February & 14 April 2019 at 2 pm

A Forest of Words

1 December 2018 – 6 January 2019.

No decorations on our tree this year! Help us make a Christmas tree out of books by choosing one on any of the following themes: collections and collectors, ceramics, glass and the arts in general, journeys, walks and discoveries. Bring your book into the museum from 1 December onwards and slip a friendship message into it. Come and find something new to read on Sunday, 6 January at 4 pm

Descriptive and tactile tours for blind or partially-sighted people

Tuesday 12 February, Thursday 14 March, Saturday 4 May 2019 at 2 pm

Prior booking required, places subject to availability.

Seminar: Revilliod's Heritage

Friday 8 March 2019, 10 am – 6 pm

Admission free, prior booking required

In conjunction with the History of Art Department of the University of Geneva. With the generous support of the Amaverunt Foundation

On your bike! Follow in Gustave Revilliod's footsteps

Saturday 13 April 2019, 10 am – 12 noon; Saturday 4 May 2019, 3 pm - 5 pm

Free, prior booking required, places subject to availability (max. 15 people)

Set off with your bike from the State Archives, 1 Rue de l'Hôtel-de-Ville

Open Workshop

Sunday 3 March 2019, 10 am – 5 pm, suitable for all visitors

Gustave Revilliod installed a bell of Japanese origin on his estate. Learn about its history before making your own clay bell.

Treasure chase on a mobile app

Sunday 21 April 2019, 2 pm – 5 pm, for children aged 6+

Guided by a fun cabin boy, you'll travel the world on a ship belonging to the East India Company in search of treasure.

A Time Capsule for Posterity

Sunday 2 June 2019 at 4 pm

Like Gustave Revilliod, who left behind 5 time capsules for posterity, concealed in the walls of his properties, the Musée Ariana will be hiding a new capsule for future generations.

Come and leave a message, a testimony or a photo connected to the museum, its founder or its collections.

Closing Concert: Ballades of Revilliod's Era

Sunday 2 June 2019 at 6 pm

Free, no reservation required

Guided tours on request

In French, English or German. Guided tours on request for the blind and partially-sighted.

Prior booking and payment required.

For groups of up to 15 people:

Standard rate: 150 CHF

Reduced rate: 75 CHF for social purpose institutions subsidised by the City of Geneva

Visitor Services

Monday - Friday

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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Musée Ariana

Swiss Museum for Ceramics and Glass

10 Avenue de la Paix, 1202 Geneva

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www.ariana-geneve.ch

Open Tuesday - Sunday 10am - 6 pm, closed on Mondays

Admission fees

5 CHF / 3 CHF

Free admission for under 18s and on the first Sunday of the month.

On all other Sundays: buy one admission ticket, get one free

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