

A landscape of museums

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Beyond these flagships, Basel has a density of museums that is unusual for a city of its size. The city counts around forty museums, a figure that its tourism organisation and cantonal authorities frequently cite as one of the highest per capita in Europe.¹ The five state museums of the canton are the Kunstmuseum, the Historisches Museum, the Naturhistorisches Museum, the Museum der Kulturen and the Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig.²

The Antikenmuseum, founded in the 1960s, owes much of its standing to private patronage. Its core holdings of Greek, Etruscan and Roman art grew through gifts of Basel collectors, while the German industrialists Peter and Irene Ludwig donated a large group of antiquities in 1981, which is recorded in the museum's name.³ The Museum der Kulturen, whose collections go back to missionary, scholarly and colonial collecting in the nineteenth century, reopened in 2011 after a renovation and extension by Herzog & de Meuron. Its holdings raise questions of provenance from colonial contexts, which the museum has addressed through research and cooperation with communities of origin.⁴ The link between these collections and the Basel Mission, which Part C described, is part of that history.

Contemporary art has its own institutions. The Kunsthalle Basel, run by the Basler Kunstverein, opened in 1872 and has since built a reputation for discovering artists early, often years before museums acquire their work.⁵ The Haus der elektronischen Künste, known as HeK, which moved to the Dreispitz in 2014, is devoted to digital and media art. Its programme connects the city's art scene with debates on technology, artificial intelligence and data, which also concern the financial centre.⁶ The Cartoonmuseum, the Spielzeug Welten Museum, the Pharmacy Museum of the University and many smaller institutions complete a landscape in which almost every interest of a resident or visitor finds a collection.

Cooperation keeps this landscape visible. The *Museumsnacht*, held every January since the early 2000s, opens the museums of Basel and its surroundings for one night to tens of thousands of visitors.⁷ The Museums-PASS-Musées, a joint ticket valid in several hundred museums in Switzerland, Germany and France, expresses the trinational character of the region in the cultural sphere.⁸ Such instruments are modest, yet they reinforce the impression, important for newcomers, that the region forms a single cultural space whatever its political borders.

1 Notes

1. On the number of museums in Basel (about 40) and the claim of one of the highest museum densities in Europe, see the publications of Basel Tourismus and the Präsidi aldepartement of the canton of Basel-Stadt. Figures to be verified. ↩
2. On the five state museums of the canton of Basel-Stadt and their governance under the cantonal museum law (Museums gesetz), see the publications of the Präsidi aldepartement Basel-Stadt. To be verified. ↩
3. On the Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, opened in 1966, and the donation by Peter and Irene Ludwig in 1981, see the publications of the museum. Dates to be verified. ↩
4. On the Museum der Kulturen Basel, its renovation and extension by Herzog & de Meuron (reopened 2011), and its provenance research on collections from colonial contexts, see the publications of the museum. Status to be verified. ↩
5. On the Kunsthalle Basel, opened in 1872 and operated by the Basler Kunstverein (founded 1839), see the publications of the Kunsthalle Basel. Dates to be verified. ↩
6. On the Haus der elektronischen Künste (HeK), its move to the Dreispitz in Münchenstein in 2014 and its programme on digital and media art, see the publications of HeK. Status to be verified. ↩
7. On the Basel Museumsnacht, held annually since 2001, and its visitor numbers, see the publications of the organisers. Figures to be verified. ↩

8. On the Museums-PASS-Musées, valid in more than 300 museums in the Upper Rhine region of Switzerland, Germany and France, see the publications of the organising association. Figures to be verified. ↩

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