

International art on a Swiss stamp

Mr. Hirschhorn, you've been living in Paris since 1984 and posting your letters with French stamps. What's your rapport with Swiss stamps?

I have to admit I hardly use Swiss stamps. Just red French definitives for all my mail, including my Swiss voting papers! I also like to write postcards and regularly send them to friends when I travel to exhibitions in other countries. It's fun to tell people I've thought about them in a certain place at a certain time.

What went through your mind when you were approached about designing a stamp for Swiss Post?

I was thrilled, because a stamp is a popular platform! Everybody's familiar with stamps, and everybody uses them. With my stamp, I can reach a broad, non-exclusive public all over the world, even people who don't know my work or are not interested in art, and I like that idea. But a stamp is damned small, so I confined myself to using it as a vehicle for a written message.

Your message is "Art is resistance", and the stamp-sheet cover features the words "I LOVE Art and Art LOVES me!" written in biro. What prompted this declaration of love?

The heart logo for "I LOVE" is universal, simple, clear and positive. It's used in all kinds of possible and impossible ways. All over the world, you'll find stickers, beach towels or tea cups with the statement "I LOVE". They take the personal and individual "I" as their point of departure but at the same time aim to elicit a response from others, on the lines of "And what do YOU like? And what do YOU stand for?"

It's understandable that you love art. But how can you say that art, as a form of expression, loves you?

My message takes its inspiration from a wonderful action piece and a film by Joseph Beuys entitled "I love America and America loves me". The idea is to assert that I let myself be loved by art. As an artist, I have to be ready to do so, just as I have to be ready to be the first person to pay for my work.

What do you mean?

I mean, I have to be ready to accept responsibility for my work, to take unjustified criticism without whining and swallow even the most idiotic misinterpretations without complaining. Why? Because, as an artist, I have the power to create my own work!

You mentioned that you find it irritating when people say you'll be representing Switzerland at the Venice Biennale. Why's that?

Because it sounds as though it's an exception and a "first" for me to be "representing" Switzerland officially with my exhibition in the Swiss Pavilion. But it's not true to say that. Because if I have to "represent" anything, then it's my work. And I represent my concept of art! Alternatively, you could say I "represent" or "have represented" Switzerland with each and every exhibition of mine, however small. Because I'm Swiss.