

The Basel Carnival

Basel Fasnacht (carnival) is a large festival of sounds and dreams, of colour and fantasy, but also of criticism and mockery. It has been evolving over the last 100 years. Since then, and now, this carnival has inspired the population and artists of this city into active participation, not only during carnival time but also all year round. The city's population uses this festival to vent their real opinions in a humorous and colourful way and to act and behave differently from their normal day to day life. For three days a year Basel lives in a different world.

UNESCO, the specialized agency of the United Nations for education, science and culture, maintains lists of selected customs, arts and buildings worthy of protection and increased attention. Basel Fasnacht is on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Part of Switzerland's application to UNESCO was a film. This can be seen on the touchscreen beside the entrance (> Video > Fasnacht in 10 minutes).

Stick lanterns by Charles Hindenlang | Basel, Switzerland | 1st half of 20th c. | Hardy Böhm, gifted in 2014 | VI 71453, VI 71454, VI 71456, VI 71458

Janus-faced drum major 'Lällekönig / Blätzlibajass' of the Rumpel Clique 1923 | Basel, Switzerland | 1987 | textile, paper | Hansruedi Siegrist, gifted in 2016 | VI 71881

1 From 'böse Fasnacht' ('bad carnival') to major event

The earliest documented reference to our Basel Fasnacht relates to a bloodbath: on the day before Ash Wednesday in 1376, a tournament held on the Münsterplatz (cathedral square) ended in a riot which is described in history books as the 'böse Fasnacht'. However, we should not forget that even before this event the term *Fastnacht* was a fixed date in the annual calendar – certainly back as far as the 13th century.

The first official bans on Fasnacht and drumming were recorded in the Book of Ordinances in the early 15th century, presumably because of the use of drums and pipes in association with 'lewd and abandoned dancing'. These official edicts also relate to the masked beggars who trooped through the streets as early as Advent in 1418. Such bans clearly proved to be effective since, commencing in the 2nd decade of the 16th century, the wearing of masks was only forbidden during the actual Fasnacht period, albeit without lasting effect.

Carnival-like revels on the Monday following Ash Wednesday predated the Reformation and are therefore far from being (as is occasionally suggested) a defiant gesture against the Catholics in the wake of the schism of 1529. The authorities tried to forbid Fasnacht in 1546 arguing that, since the Reformation had abolished the 40 days of fasting, anticipatory pre-Lenten merrymaking had become superfluous. Thanks to the chronicler Fridolin Ryff we know that, at least since 1540, home guard and Fasnacht were closely interrelated phenomena: masked figures were involved on the Monday after Ash Wednesday in the review of Basel guilds and corporations based just outside the town walls. Contemporary sources during the centuries that followed described processions of military appearance

which also included masked figures, as well as carnival-like events in private houses and in the guild halls. One such event was the carnival procession announced by the 'Zum hohen Dolder' suburban corporation in 1783.

After the Helvetic revolution, it was only from 1802 onwards, when the serious political turmoil had abated, that the people of Basel began to celebrate Fasnacht again. Initially, the big parades organised by the citizenry were not annual events and, in fact, they had little in common with the Fasnacht procession as we know it today. The fact that German words such as 'Fasching' and 'Karneval' were used throughout the 19th century shows that many elements were borrowed from various parts of Germany during that period.

Following the division of the Basel cantons of 1832/33, the upper classes withdrew from Fasnacht for a few decades. In the years 1842 and 1843, well-meaning people tried to turn Fasnacht into a festival for the young. Then, after the formation of the Swiss Federation (1848), political topics were increasingly being aired at Fasnacht. Quite soon lanterns began to make their appearance, initially only at Morgenstreich. During the second half of the 19th century the Fasnacht parades, often masterminded by an artist, still closely resembled the historic festive processions which were particularly popular at the time. Not infrequently, though, these parades attracted sharp criticism. Some of them made fun of foreign potentates or the papacy and, as a result, kept the courts and diplomats busy.

Catholic Basel only began its gradual acceptance of Basel's Fasnacht from 1890 onwards, although Catholic groups continued to celebrate 'their' Fasnacht in events held in public premises prior to Ash Wednesday. Quodlibet, the club founded in 1858, not only organised balls, but — from 1866 onwards — processions, too. In 1884 it for the first time awarded prizes to particularly witty Sujets (carnival subjects). This club, which was mainly composed of 'new citizens', increasingly sought to ensure order and a higher standard of Fasnacht activity. It is thanks to Quodlibet and to other such organizations that Fasnacht gradually developed its own Basel style during the last decades of the 19th century. It is no coincidence that, in 1910, members of Quodlibet were actively involved in establishing the Fasnacht Committee which still plays a leading role today. The initiative, however, originally came from the local tourist office.

Some important dates

- 1906 The first Monstre-Trommelkonzert held in the Burgvogtei and the first lantern exhibition (in the courtyard of the Steinenschule).
- 1909 'Prinz Karneval' rides along with the procession for the last time.
- 1910 The Fasnachts-Comité is founded.
- 1911 The first Fasnachtsplakette (badge) — and the last Morgenstreich on a Wednesday as well.
- 1915 Establishment of the Vereinigte Schnitzelbankgesellschaft Basel (VSGB).
- 1920 Establishment of the Basler Schnitzelbank-Gesellschaft (BSG). Fasnacht is postponed for four weeks due to a flu epidemic.
- 1921 Establishment of the Schnitzelbank Committee as well as founding of 'Herrenmättli', the first float formation and the oldest, still active 'float clique'.

- 1924 The spelling 'Fastnacht' (with 'st') appears on the Plakette for the last time.
- 1925 The Basel state art fund announces a competition for Fasnacht masks. Paul Wilde wins 1st prize with his 'Anishansli' mask.
- 1939 Athletes of the men's gymnastics club of the Church of the Holy Spirit, manning a float under the name 'Güete Bonjour-Clique', are the first Catholic group to take part in the parade.
- 1939 The first women-only Clique is founded ('Die Abverheyte').
- 1945 The Fasnachts-Comité organises a Fasnacht exhibition in the Kunsthalle as a substitute for Fasnacht, cancelled for the sixth time because of the war.
- 1946 The clock of St. Martins Church strikes four on Monday morning 11th March, signalling the end of the years without Fasnacht and providing an outlet for long pent-up Fasnacht enthusiasm.
- 1951 The Gugge-IG is founded as the first association for Gugge musicians (people playing discordant music on instruments of every kind). Another group, the FG (= Freie Guggemusiken) is formed in 1965.
- 1962 The first Morgenstreich without Guggemusig. In compensation, the piccolo and drumming Cliques allow them to parade and perform on the Tuesday evening (which is known as 'Guggezyschtig').
- 1974 The Wage-IG is founded for Cliques which parade with float.
- 1976 Other concerts – the 'Charivari', the 'Pfyfferli' and the 'Räppli-Serenade' – start up in competition to the Monstre-Trommelkonzert. Other pre-Fasnacht events follow.
- 1987 As a result of a collision of dates with the MUBA fair, the lantern exhibition moves to Münsterplatz – an innovation which proves very popular.
- 1993 The Monstre-Trommelkonzert takes place in the large festival hall of Basel Exhibition for the first time, relocating from the Kuchlin Theatre where this most traditional of all pre- Fasnacht events had been held since 1914.
- 2004 The Comité adds a new badge to the three traditional Plakette. This is the Bijou, a mini- version costing one hundred francs.
- 2010 The Fasnachts-Comité celebrates its centennial anniversary.
- 2013 The Musical Theater becomes the fifth location for the Monstre-Trommelkonzert.
- 2017 Basel Fasnacht is appointed as world cultural heritage by UNESCO.
- 2020 Three days before the Morgenstreich, carnival is cancelled as part of the measures to combat the Corona pandemic.
- 2021 In place of the cancelled carnival, people are invited to visit the various prominent spots of the Basel Fasnacht on a special carnival walk individually.
- 2022 After two long years, carnival is finally given the go-ahead again – but without the parade.

2 Tambourmajor (drum major)

The visual impact created by a drum major is one of the most impressive aspects of Fasnacht. He or she strides majestically between piccolo players and drummers, wearing an impressive costume topped by an outsize mask which together form a key element in the subject being lampooned by the Clique. The drum major's mace keeps the musicians in time and is also useful when making obeisance to specially favoured on lookers.

Drum major with mask, costume, and requisite on the Sujet 'Hoim ins Reich' [Back home to the Reich, an allusion to the decision of Nazi Germany to summon all German maids to return home] of the Lälli Clique Alti Garde, mask designed by Alphonse Magne | Basel, Switzerland | paper, wood wool, paint, textile, leather | 1939 | Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, permanent loan 1939 | VI 15592-93, VI 15595

Drum major's baton | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1910 | wood, silver, textile | Fasnachtsgesellschaft Sans Gêne, permanent loan 1953 | VI 19914

Drum major's mask on the Sujet 'Max der Kämpfer. Der Ritter ohne Furcht und Tadel' [allusion to the scandal provoked by Max Kämpf's alleged portrait of Stalin at the Basel Handelsschule], Breo Clique 1896 | Basel, Switzerland | 1951 | paper, paint | Hans Fischer, gifted in 1977 | VI 46406

3 The Cortège — the big parade

In those far-off days, when the badge was called an 'Abzeichen' instead of a Plakette and when Basel's carnival was still spelled 'Fastnacht' (that is, with an interpolated 't'), the Cortège on the Monday and Wednesday afternoons was a far less elaborate parade than it is today.

The number of Cliques, 'Ziigli' (little groups) and floats was manageable in those days and women were almost always confined to riding in a Chaise or carriage. Leafing back through the annals of Fasnacht, we see that during the whole of the 19th century Basel's festive carnival processions were virtually indistinguishable from those in other areas.

Today, impressive and immensely colourful parades are a feature of the two afternoons. There are so many active participants that the Fasnachts-Comité has had to devise a highly convoluted route to avoid bottlenecks and to ensure that spectators can, without hindrance, enjoy the rich variety of sounds, colours and carnival humour.

Carnival parades of the 19th and early 20th century

'Fastnacht 1850', pen and ink lithograph by A. Hegar | Basel, Switzerland | 1850 | paper | Schweizerisches Institut für Volkskunde, permanent loan 1987 | VI 61305

'Fastnacht Basel 1866' on the Sujet of the American Civil War | Basel, Switzerland | 1866 | Papier | Schweizerisches Institut für Volkskunde, permanent loan 1980 | VI 52818

'Basler Fastnacht 1885', design by Karl Jauslin, lithograph by Müller's Druckerei | Basel, Switzerland | 1885 | paper | Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer Collection, bequest in 1938 | VI 12940

'Basler Carneval 1891 Bogen I', lithograph by Müller-Schmid | Basel, Switzerland | 1891 | paper | Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer Collection, bequest in 1938 | VI 12949

'Basler Fastnacht 1898. Bogen I', lithograph by Müller-Schmid | Basel, Switzerland | 1898 | paper | Schweizerisches Institut für Volkskunde, permanent loan 1980 | VI 52826

'Basler Fastnacht 1909. Bogen N° 1', lithograph by Müller's Druckerei | Basel, Switzerland | 1909 | paper | Schweizerisches Institut für Volkskunde, permanent loan 1980 | VI 52831

4 Clique and Comité

The word 'Clique' is a generic term applied to a group of people who club together in order to celebrate Fasnacht. Their sharing of the carnival experience breeds a spirit of togetherness within the Clique: a secondary effect is that there are strikingly few contacts between one organised group and another. Clique members meet throughout the year and therefore often also socialise at events unrelated to Fasnacht. Some people enjoy a very firm bond with their Clique which remains close to their hearts throughout their lives.

Each Clique has a link to the Fasnachts-Comité, the official body which has ensured since Fasnacht 1911 that the 'drei scheenschte Dääg' ('the three most magnificent days') run smoothly. Organised in the form of a society, the Comité is composed of 10-15 men and – since 1999 – also women, who all act in an honorary capacity. Each member has a specific responsibility and maintains contact with the individual authorities. Collaboration with police, fire brigade and building department is a major priority. The Comité also organises the Monstre-Trommelkonzert, the Plakette and the publication of Rädäbäng (the Fasnacht guide). The revenue generated by sales of these Plakette goes into the subsidy distributed to those carnival groups who register for the parade. The Fasnachts-Comité has a secretariat which handles carnival matters throughout the year.

Mask on the Sujet 'Stadtindianer (Schloofkappe I)' of the Kuttlebutzer | Basel, Switzerland | 1976 | plastic, paint, artificial feathers, wire | Collection of Robert und Cécile Hiltbrand-Grimmeisen, gifted in 2014 | RH 17089

Photos: Rony Burk, Helen Sager, Hans Bertolf, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, Archive of Jeisy Migger, MKB, Dominik Wunderlin, unknown photographers

5 Bängg, Zeedel and Zyttige

The people of Basel are known far and wide for their 'esprit moqueur', a predilection for ridicule that hits peak form during the carnival period. The days when scorn and derision culminated in an appearance before a judge - and occasionally even the odd diplomatic protest - are long gone, however. It's not that the poets of carnival have ditched derision, but everyone now knows how far they can go and where, more or less, the boundaries of good taste lie – and international politics is a field better avoided, given that local and national events offer talking points and punch lines enough..

There is no shortage of written and spoken verse at the carnival. Take, for example, the 'Zugszedel' distributed by the groups parading in the Cortège. Printed on lengths of coloured paper in the form of rhyming doggerel (sometimes brilliant, sometimes rather less so) and written in Basel-German of varying degrees of purity, these refer in humorous terms to the Sujet selected by the Clique. Then there are the couplets inscribed on lanterns and floats.

And also the very special 'Schnitzelbängg', or satirical verses, which are sung on the Monday and Wednesday evening in packed bars and restaurants in the centre of town by balladeers ('Bänggler'), who tend to become increasingly hoarse as the evening wears on. Many listeners take particular pleasure in figuring out the illustrations which the 'Bänggler' display to accompany each stanza. Incidentally, these singers are considered particularly skillful when they can save their punch line until the very end of a verse; indeed, choice examples often reap prolonged applause.

Carnival newspaper 'Der Basler Beppi. Illustrierte Narrenzeitung' | Basel, Switzerland | 1875 | paper | Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer Collection, bequest in 1938 | VI 12946

Carnival leaflet of the 'Gugge-Musik Basel!' | Basel, Switzerland | 1907 | paper | old collection

Carnival newspaper 'Schorsch Gaggo' | Basel, Switzerland | 1953 | paint | Robert Wildhaber, gifted in 1972 | VI 40313

At the window

25 subjectively selected Schnitzelbank verses from different associations between 1926 and 2003. Even after decades, they are often as relevant as on the day they were first performed.

6 Drumming and piccolo playing

The marches performed by the drum and piccolo players are not infrequently the work of well-known composers. Apart from modern pieces inspired by jazz or by the classics, which testify to the dynamics and versatility of this special Basel music culture, a Clique's repertoire is mainly made up of traditional tunes which have their origin in folk melodies and, in particular, in the old military marches and mustering calls. The 'Morgestreich' march, for example, and the first 9 verses of the 'Alte Schweizer Märsche' are based on an old military rallying call known as the 'Sammlung' and the 'Feldschritte' - or slow march - used for troop movements.

These tunes, in common with Basel drum and piccolo playing in general, were not composed in this town on the bend of the Rhine, but are derived from Swiss and French military traditions or, to be more precise, were passed down by the many Swiss regiments which used to serve under the French flag.

The story of the development of Basel's very own drum and piccolo tradition is associated with the names of a large number of creative instructors. It all started in 1818 with a musical directive issued by Johannes Bühler (1786-1850), an experienced drum instructor from Wattwil, and was continued by a line of professional drummers formerly in French service and the drummers trained by them.

Thanks to technical and tonal improvements, today's piccolo can also play new, complex and virtuoso compositions with low registers, a refinement not least owed to the instrument makers Erwin Oesch senior and junior. The credit for the astonishing revival of Basel's piccolo playing since the 1960s goes to them.

Piccolo player's mask, design by Yvonne Binz | Oberwil, Baselland, Switzerland | ca 1985 | paper, paint | Reto Lippold, gifted in 2003 | VI 69911

Two piccolos with one and six keys | Basel, Switzerland | before 1953 | wood, metal | Werner Winter, gifted in 1953 | VI 19821-22

Piccolo | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1950 | wood, metal | Annarosa Schell, gifted in 2001 | VI 69595

Piccolo with tuning peg | Kraslice, Czech Republic | ca 1950 | wood, metal | Annarosa Schell, gifted in 2001 | VI 69596

Work step in the production of a piccolo | Basel, Switzerland | 1998 | wood, metal | Erwin Oesch junior, gifted in 1998 | VI 75339

Work step in the production of a Basel drum, finished drum and drumsticks | Basel, Switzerland | 1998 | wood, metal, leather, calfskin | Walter Bächler and André Steiner, gifted in 1998 | VI 72340-41, VI 72342, VI 72343.01-02

Calfskin drum pad with drumsticks for practice during the year | Basel, Switzerland | around 1930 | wood, calfskin, felt | ca 1939 | Estate of Georg Duthaler, gifted in 2000 | VI 69444, VI 69445.01-02, VI 69507.01-02

Drumsticks | Basel, Switzerland | around 2000 | wood | Dominik Wunderlin, gifted in 2000 | VI 69507.01-02

Music book 'Basler Trommelmärsche für Piccolo' issued by Musik Hug | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1930 | paper | Willy Ersig, gifted in 2002 | VI 69671

Music book 'Trommelschule der Fasnachtsclique Alti Stainlemer' | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1950 | paper | Willy Ersig, gifted in 2002 | VI 69674

7 Drum notations and individual Clique styles

Despite growing harmonisation of drumming styles in recent years, many marches are drummed differently from one Clique to another. As Basel drumming developed, various phonetic and written versions began to appear ('Schnuuredrummle', 'Hieroglyphen', musical notations) along with a variety of Clique styles shaped by prominent drumming teachers. A joint repertoire does exist for 'Hieroglyphen' and Berger-notation style drummers. In many cases, however, differences in interpretation as regards stress, rolls, rhythm and tempo make it difficult for pupils of different schools to drum together.

Reproduction of a piccolo fingering chart from the music book 'Das Basler Pfeifen' by Paul 'Bolle' Lächler | Basel, Switzerland | around 1960 | paper | Annarosa Schell, gifted in 2001 | VI 69597

Reproductions of drum notations from the music book 'Das Basler Trommeln' by Fritz R. Berger | Basel, Switzerland | 1928 | paper | Willy Ersig, gifted in 2002 | VI 69675

Classic and modern Basel marches for drumming and piccolo playing can be heard continuously:

Morgestraich und Appenzeller | Arabi | Rossignol | Basel Nord | dr Yankee | Rhysprung | z'Basel am mym Rhy | s Nunnefirzli | Pfeifer-Retraite | Monty (Liberty Bell) | d Irländer | s Prodäschtmärschli

Excerpts from various CD productions of the Basel Carnival

8 From improvised music group to Guggenmusik

Nothing divides Basel's carnival lovers more than Guggenmusik, and yet it is pointless to debate whether or not the groups which play this cacophonous music should be entitled to perform at Fasnacht. In actual fact, Guggenmusik has been part of Basel's carnival for a very long time. Groups of musicians playing what can only be termed a strange combination of instruments are documented as far back as 1800. As long ago as 1876, complaints were being made about the appearance of brass bands at the 'Morgenstreich' in which they would continue to participate until 1961. Nowadays, the big day for the 'Guggenmusik' bands is the Tuesday, when they march through the streets and give evening concerts in the city's squares in front of thousands of their fans.

The origin of the word ‘Guggenmusik’ remains uncertain. It first appeared in a 1906 list of carnival parade ensembles when one musical group chose as its Sujet the trip to Germany made by the ‘cacophonous’ brass band Concordia. Today, there are about 65 Guggenmusik groups, most of them with male and female members. Their influence as an integrating element for newcomers to Basel wishing to take an active part in Fasnacht cannot be underestimated. Finally, it is incontestable that Basel is the birthplace of the Guggenmusik movement which today encompasses the whole of central Europe and even beyond.

Trombone | Paris, Île de France, France | 1960 | metal | Peter Hanauer, gifted in 1998 | VI 69255

‘Waggis’ mask | Basel, Switzerland | 2nd half of 20th c. | paper, paint, raffia | old collection

Turkish crescent of a musical band | Aargau, Switzerland | around 1900 | metal | Antiquarian Lapaire, purchased in 1924 | VI 9962

9 Morgenstreich — or: the hours between dreamtime and daytime

‘Säälig gniesse’, these words in Basel dialect can be loosely translated as ‘blissful enjoyment’. This is the sentiment which floats like a golden cloud over the 72 hours of carnival heaven. The term describes what both active and passive carnival participants relish most: they want to enjoy in a quiet and introverted manner every moment of the time between Morgenstreich and Endstreich. When the clock strikes four on Monday and all the city lights go out, that is when the enjoyment begins, made all the more poignant because everyone knows that this masquerade is of cruelly short duration. Then comes the moment when the drum major gives the command ‘Ach — tung! Dr Morgestraich - vorwärts, marsch!’ Although it is the first march, it is played on-the-spot, but in formation. Only after this overture does movement start as each Clique embarks on its own route in the early morning darkness, illuminated by nothing more than its processional lantern and smaller head-mounted and hand-held lanterns.

On this early morning — for which every participant has been eagerly waiting all year - people file through the streets, stopping now and then for a warming ‘Mehlsuppe’ (flour soup) and wedge of ‘Käse-’ or ‘Zwiebelwähe’ (cheese or onion quiche).

Painting ‘Morgestreich mit Guggemusig’ by Heiri Strub | Basel, Switzerland | 1952 | varnish, oil, Hessian | Heiri Strub, purchased in 2000 | VI 69554

Print ‘Morgenstreich 1843’ with naked torches instead of lanterns and fanfares in the background, after a watercolour by Hieronymus Hess, issued by the Verein für populäre Kunstpflege | Basel, Switzerland | around 1925 | paper | Dominik Wunderlin, gifted in 2022 | VI 72335

Depiction of the ‘Morgenstreich 1857’ with lantern in the shape of spiked helmet | Basel, Switzerland | 2nd half of 19th c. | lithograph | Eduard Vischer-Jenny, gifted in 1985 | VI 60021

Woodcut ‘Der Morgenstreich der Basler Kinder’ after a sketch by Carl Huth in the Allgemeine Illustrierte Zeitung über Land und Meer Nr. 20 | Stuttgart, Germany | 1873 | paper | Schweizerisches Institut für Volkskunde, permanent loan 1980 | VI 52816

10 Harlequin

In recent years, this comic figure of Italian commedia dell'arte has become the most popular of carnival figures. Some researchers see the harlequin as being the medieval English 'hariloking', the leader of the Wild Horde, or ghostly army, which has a firm place in European folk beliefs.

Carnival costume with mask 'Harlekin' | Basel, Switzerland | around 1985 | textile, paper, paint | old collection | VI 69917

Stick lantern, painted by Ernst Rudin | Basel, Switzerland | around 1960 | canvas, paint, wood | on loan from Rumpel-Clique Basel, Inv. Nr. 3

11 The lantern

The lantern is the pride and joy of every Clique. It is not unusual — inter alia because of the limited size of most studios — for the often several meter-high canvas structure only to be completed a few days before Morgenstreich. The lantern is produced by an artist who paints vivid pictures imbued with carnival wit. Internally-mounted lighting ensures that these images shine out far and wide.

The Basel carnival lantern was born in 1845, when the police banned the use of blazing torches during the Morgenstreich parade because of safety considerations. Lanterns were chosen as an alternative, and it was not long before artists began decorating them on all sides. Initially it involved quite small lanterns which were borne by two carriers, along with stick lanterns and such worn on the back. As from 1860, the lanterns became increasingly larger. 1864 was the year in which a lantern featured for the first time in the afternoon parade. Since in the early decades the lanterns usually had the shape of an oversized, intricately constructed object, they also developed impact in daylight. Witty verses – though yet rarely in Basel dialect – began to appear on the lanterns in the 1870s.

We know the names of only a few of those who created the large lanterns of the main Cliques during this early period. They were more likely to have been house painters and decorators (such as Samuel Baur) rather than professional artists. The situation changed at the turn of the century and then especially after the First World War. From 1919 onwards, more and more lanterns bore the hallmark of a generation of artists familiar with the latest artistic trends: indeed, some had even studied in major European art centres.

Many Cliques traditionally fetch their lantern from the artist late on the Sunday afternoon. Their piccolo players, accompanied by the rest of the Clique, all of them wearing civilian clothes, then pipe it (swathed in some concealing covering) to the place from which they will set off at Morgenstreich. When the lantern is lit for the first time, shortly before four in the morning, the members of the Clique will (more often than not) agree: 'Mir hänn wider e scheeni Lambbe!' ('Haven't we got a beautiful lantern again!').

Each and every lantern artist cultivates his or her very own style. Most of them – and this also applies to today's artists – have developed an artistic language that, on the one hand, reflects the traditions of popular art but is also open to the latest trends in art.

Lantern side 'Das Quodlibet den Schweizer Turnern' | Basel, Switzerland | end of 19th c. | textile, paint | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70728

Fragment of a lantern featuring the Sujet 'Französische Regierungskrise (General McMahon)' | Basel, Switzerland | 1878 | textile | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70729

Front of lantern featuring the Sujet 'S Uni-Reformatorium' of the clique Alti Schnooggekerzli by Valéry Maier-Heussler | Basel, Switzerland | 1968 | canvas, paint | Alti Schnooggekerzli, purchased in 1969 | VI 36564

Front of lantern featuring the Sujet 'Friss und Stirb | Uff em Krüzzug für e besseri Wält' of the Fasnachtsgesellschaft Olympia 1908 by Steven Gravino | Basel, Switzerland | 2017 | polyester, paint | reproduction on behalf of MKB, 2022

Drafts of carnival parades | Basel, Switzerland | 1878, 1879, 1880 | paper, paint | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70733-35

12 How a lantern is created

Not every lantern is created in the same way. Once the design has been perfected on the basis of a succession of sketches, it is transferred to a canvas that has been stretched over a frame and treated with an undercoat. Some artists do this freehand, some are guided by a faint grid, yet others use digital imaging and plotters.

A wide variety of paints are used; the only criterion being that light must be able to pass through them: coloured Indian inks, stains, watercolours, aniline, oil or fabric paints. Once the outside has been completed, any parts which fail to stand out sufficiently are painted on the inside too; this is called 'back painting'. Finally, the verses and epigrams are added — not forgetting the all-important witticisms on the door which provides access to the internal lights. Generally speaking, once the lantern is ready, Morgenstreich cannot be far away!

Drafts for carnival lanterns

Sujet 'Spiritus Helveticus', Fasnachtsgesellschaft Olympia 1908, draft by Otto Plattner | Basel, Switzerland | 1939 | paper, paint | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70730.01-02

Sujet 'Dies Fasnachtsdemicus' of Central Club Basel 1911 (CCB), draft by Kurt Pauletto | Basel, Switzerland | 1980 | paper, paint | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70732.01-02

Sujet 'Jä Nei! oder e Basler Bilderboge', Fasnachtsgesellschaft Olympia 1908 Alti Garde, draft by Britta Grob Pauletto | Basel, Switzerland | 1974 | paper, paint | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70731.01-02

Picture of cow and giant in a sealed bottle | Basel, Switzerland | before 1981 | paper, paint | Marco Nanni, gifted in 1981 | VI 54608-09

13 The traditional way of making a Fasnacht mask

A three-dimensional mould is made from clay on the basis of a sketch. Once the clay model begins to dry, it is coated with a thin layer of Vaseline so that the thickly applied plaster can subsequently be easily removed. The inside of this plaster cast, which serves as the negative mould, is treated with a special lacquer. After it has dried, the inner surface is coated with Vaseline too.

Now the laminating begins: mask paper (in about 200 g quality) is torn into short strips, coated with paste, arranged in the mould and pressed down firmly. Four layers are usually enough. After initial drying, the 'raw' mask is detached from the hollow mould, placed on a rack and allowed to dry completely at room temperature. White undercoat is then applied to the outside and the inside is coated with shellac. Once the blank is dry again, superfluous

cardboard edges are trimmed off.

The mask is then painted using acrylic paints, emulsion and artist's oil paints. Not infrequently, a few brush strokes and splodges of paint are all that are needed to give the mask the desired expression. The future wearer of the mask tries on this 'second face' in combination with a form of rigid cap called a 'Güpfi'. Holes are cut into the mask for the eyes, nostrils and mouth, and the mask is then riveted on to the 'Güpfi'. The wig (made, for example, from hemp, raffia or sisal), and possibly a hat and/or some special decoration, are then firmly secured in place.

14 A joint effort

The most important meetings during the year of a Fasnacht group include the 'Sujetsitzungen' (discussions of the subject) and the 'Lämbbesitzung' (post festum). Whereas the latter serves to talk over the past Fasnacht and to air any grievances (and can occasionally lead to the group's splitting up), the sessions devoted to choosing the subject consider which event the Clique would like to make fun of at Fasnacht.

Once the choice has been made, the artists and poets, who often remain faithful to a Clique for many years, consider how to stage their subject. Designs are prepared for the masks and costumes. Orders are then despatched in good time to the mask studio and to the dressmaker. The person entrusted with the writing of the 'Zeedel' (printed doggerel verse setting out the subject) withdraws to work on his or her composition in a process known as 'Värslibrinzle', and the person responsible for the accompanying wagon instructs the team to ensure that it makes a worthy final element in the formation and properly reflects the chosen subject.

Designs for costumes and processions

Costume designs for drummers and men on floats on the Sujet 'Dänkmolpfläg' | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1935 | paper | Theo Gantner, purchased or gifted in 1980 | VI 52130-31

Two drafts of 'Waldi' for the drummers of the Fasnachtsgesellschaft Olympia 1908 by Max Sulzbachner | Basel, Switzerland | 1949 | paper | Max Sulzbachner, gifted in 1969 | VI 36634-35

Two sketches by Martha Pfannenschmied for the Schnitzelbank 'Bäredräggschlägger' | Basel, Switzerland | 1966 | Papier | Oliver Wackernagel, gifted in 1986 | VI 60500a-b

Sketch 'Tambourmajor der Kuttelbutzer' by Robert Hiltbrand | Basel, Switzerland | 1960 | Robert Hiltbrand, gifted in 1970 | VI 36962

Two drafts by Valery Maier-Heussler for the Sujet 'Wahlkampf' of the Alti Schnooggekerzli 1929 | Basel, Switzerland | 1964 | paper, paint | Valery Maier-Heussler, purchased in 1969 | VI 36547-48

Three drafts by Theo Ballmer for the Sujet 'HD Lämppli' of the clique Alti Richtig | Basel, Switzerland | 1955 | paper | Evi and Thomas Keller-Bühler, gifted in 1970 | VI 37008, VI 37015, VI 37016

Mise en scène of mask studio

Models of masks from the studios Tschudin and Magne.

White primed masks by Ruedi Schmid, Thomas Keller, Ernst Streit, Heiggy Müller, Adolph Tschudin, Peter Moillet, Benedikt Remund, Willi Hege, Vera von Reizenstein, Faustina Iselin, Roger Magne, and others.

Mask of drum major 'Bildhauer Alexander Zschokke' for the Sujet 'Der Schnauz vo Basel' of the Breo-Clique 1896 | Basel, Switzerland | 1951 | paper, paint, textile | Hans Fischer, gifted in 1977 | VI 46403

Draft of drum major's mask 'D Schnytzge' [reference to former Governing Councillor Arnold Schneider] by Thomas Keller | Basel, Switzerland | 1970 | paper | Evi and Thomas Keller-Bühler, gifted in 1970 | VI 37007

Harlequin or Ueli mask, draft by Alphonse Magne | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1970 | paper, paint | Roger Magne, gifted in 1987 | VI 61913

Carnival newspaper 'Basler Narrenspiegel' | Basel, Switzerland | 1872 | paper | Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer Collection, bequest in 1938 | VI 12941

Head-lantern, Fasnachtsgesellschaft Olympia 1908 Junge Garde, mounted on hat with wig | Basel, Switzerland | 1938 | textile, paint, wire, raffia | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70725

Mask | Basel, Switzerland | 1925 | paper, paint | Adolf Tschudin, gifted in 1932 | VI 11188

Small lantern of a spontaneously formed 'Schyssdräggziigli', design by Niklaus Stoecklin | Basel, Switzerland | 1956 | textile, paint, wood | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70727

Graphics 'Waggis' und 'Alti Dante' by Roger Magne | Basel, Switzerland | around 1980 | paper, wood | Dominik Wunderlin, gifted in 2022 | VI 72336-37

15 Is Fasnacht a luxury? Is it a waste of money?

Questions such as these have been raised in the past and often also appear in the daily papers. It goes without saying that real fans of Fasnacht would never agree; indeed, they are more likely to point out just how important carnival is to the local economy. As for psychologists, they mention the beneficial effects of letting off steam during Fasnacht, a time when people can get things off their chest and express themselves freely, and would argue the masked participants even infect onlookers with their zest for life and optimism, and so cheer them up.

Those who are left cold by Fasnacht, and even see it as the work of the devil, had better stay away. In the old days, they would head off up to Chrischona just outside Basel; today they might even resort to handing out moralizing leaflets. And what about those stick-in-the-muds not bitten by the Fasnacht bug? They head off to the ski slopes or the Caribbean sun!

Still, Fasnacht attracts hordes of spectators and is estimated to involve a 'cast' of over 20,000. Surely that is ample proof of the unbroken hold that this festival – a mosaic made up of countless pieces – still has on Basel's residents and visitors alike.

16 Far from ancient

A fascinating aspect of what is now regarded as an important part of local custom is not, in fact, rooted in ancient tradition. Until the 1920s, masks tended to be imported, although they were often subsequently painted and adapted to individual requirements. Most of these masks were made in workshops in Saxonia and Thuringia (Germany). In contrast, Waggis masks came from a factory in Italy while the delicate wax half-masks came from Holland, France and Italy.

Roughly between 1920 and 1939 a Basel firm, Métraux-Bucherer in the Freie Strasse, became involved in the distribution, and increasingly later also in the manufacture, of masks. In 1925, the company also contributed the prize money of 600 francs for a competition

launched by the Staatliche Kunstcredit intended to encourage Basel's artists to come up with new masks and to establish a new "branch of decorative arts". The first prize was awarded to a sculptor called Paul Wilde for his 'Änishänsli' mask; the second prize went to Hans Haefliger-Weber. Located in Freie Strasse, Métraux-Bucherer purchased their designs and included them in their product range. 'Änishänsli' did not become a sales hit, however; come the next Fasnacht, third-placed 'Koks' by the artist Max Varin sold in far greater numbers. That company's relatively lightweight and yet hard-wearing wax half-masks were made of glued canvas which was placed over a positive plaster cast and pressed into shape using the negative.

Half mask with glasses | Basel, Switzerland | 1860 | wood, natural paint | Wilhelm Vischer-Iselin, gifted in 1915 | VI 6684

Half mask with glasses | Basel, Switzerland | 1860 | wood, natural paint | Rudolf Iselin, gifted in 1939 | VI 15354

Mask 'Mäntelilarve' | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1920 | fabric | Robert Wildhaber, gifted in 1959 | VI 25955

Wire mesh mask | Basel, Switzerland | 1956 | wire mesh, paint | Werner Batschelet, gifted in 1956 | VI 22238

Wire mesh mask | Basel, Switzerland | 1966 | wire mesh, paint | Alfred Bühler, gifted in 1966 | VI 32693

Wire mesh mask | Basel, Switzerland | around 1930 | wire mesh, reinforced edge | Astrid Capicci-Schmutz, purchased in 1983 | VI 57050

Parade mask and Ueli mask of the clique Basler Mittwoch-Gesellschaft 1907 | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1920 | metal | Legacy of Kurt Paul Grieder-Schaub, gifted in 2000 | VI 69370-71

Two small Bergamasco masks | Basel, Switzerland | 1935 | cloth, wax coating | Heinrich Müller, gifted in 1960 | VI 26974, VI 26976

Mask | Basel, Switzerland | before 1940 | wax | Dominik Wunderlin, gifted in 1987 | VI 61427

Small Bergamasco mask | Basel, Switzerland | 1950 | cloth, wax | Valery Maier-Heussler, gifted in 1960 | VI 26967

Small Bergamasco mask | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1920 | wax canvas | Robert Wildhaber, gifted in 1959 | VI 25950

Small Bergamasco mask | Basel, Switzerland | 1935 | cloth, wax coating | Heinrich Müller, gifted in 1960 | VI 26977

Canvas masks from the mask studio Métraux-Bucherer

Mask 'Grasaff', model by Adolf Weisskopf, painted by Eduard Gunzinger | Basel, Switzerland | 1923 | canvas | Max Bucherer, gifted in 1941 | VI 16079

Mask 'Hans' by Paul Wilde | Basel, Switzerland | 1923 | canvas | Max Bucherer, gifted in 1941 | VI 16072

Mask 'Grasteufel' by Max Bucherer | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1925 | canvas | Max Bucherer, gifted in 1941 | VI 16072

Mask 'Gufeknepfli' by Max Varin | Basel, Switzerland | 1929 | canvas | Max Bucherer, gifted in 1941, VI 16078

Mask face with orange hair | Basel, Switzerland | 1922 | waxed canvas, textile | Robert Wildhaber, gifted in 1959 | VI 25951

Draft of mask 'Muster Nr. 529°' | Basel, Switzerland | around 1935 | waxed canvas | Rudolf Métraux, purchased in 1988 | VI 62528

Mask | Basel, Switzerland | 1930 | cloth, lacquer | Valery Maier-Heussler, gifted in 1960 | VI 26969

Mask 'Schneerli', painted by Emil Métraux | Basel, Switzerland | 1937 | paper, paint | Max Bucherer, gifted in 1941 | VI 16083

Mask 'Schangi', created by Jakob Vogt | Basel, Switzerland | 1924 | canvas, paint | Max Bucherer, gifted in 1941 | VI 16074

Mask 'Profässer', created by Hans Häfliger-Weber | Basel, Switzerland | 1925 | canvas, paint | Max Bucherer, gifted in 1941 | VI 16076

Parade mask 'Schnauzi' of the Alti Schnooggekerzli 1929, created by Hans Seiler | Basel, Switzerland | 1929 | canvas, paint | Max Bucherer, gifted in 1941 | VI 16080

Eight drafts of masks, produced by Studio Métraux & Cie | Basel | Switzerland, 1925-1930 | waxed canvas | Rudolf Métraux, purchased in 1988:

Model 'Nr. 467' | VI 62523

Model 'Nr. 181A' | VI 62526

Model 'Nr. 71E' | VI 62527

Model 'Nr. 71C' | VI 62524

Model 'Nr. 513B' | VI 62532

Model 'Nr. 45C' | VI 62531, design by Max Varin

Model 'Nr. 125' | VI 62519

Model 'Nr. 313B' | VI 62534

Carnival mask 'Änishänsli', designed by Paul Wilde | Basel, Switzerland | 1925 | canvas, oil paint | Max Bucherer, gifted in 1941 | VI 16075

Plaster positive 'Änishänsli', designed by Paul Wilde | Basel, Switzerland | 1925 | plaster | Hans Fischer, gifted in 1977 | VI 46400

Unfinished mask | Basel, Switzerland | no date | canvas | Hans Fischer, gifted in 1977 | VI 46412e

Three mask models | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1925 | waxed canvas | Rudolf Métraux, purchased in 1988 | VI 62522, VI 62530, VI 62535

Costume 'Dummpeter' [Caricature of a member of the upper class in the Ancien Régime] | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1903 | brocaded silk, silk, porcelain, paper | Mrs K. Sandreuter-Alioth, gifted in 1973 | VI 41061a-g

Mask | Basel, Switzerland | 1st half of 20th c. | cotton, paint | Hans Fischer, gifted in 1952 | VI 19795

Children's costume 'Blätzlibajass' | Basel, Switzerland | around 1965 | textile, metal | old collection

Carnival mask 'Batzelärvli' | Basel, Switzerland | around 1925 | paper, paint | Valery Maier-Heussler, gifted in 1960 | VI 26968

17 The Basel artist's mask

Looking more carefully at illustrations of Fasnacht from around the end of the 19th century one notes that, while faces were often hidden behind a mask, these aids to concealment often looked very different from their modern counterparts, being generally made of glued canvas coated with wax. They were sold by costume hirers and toy merchants, who imported them from abroad.

After the First World War, two young Fasnacht enthusiasts began to wonder if there were no alternative to imported goods. The theatre painter and mask-maker Paul Rudin taught Alphonse ('Fuffi') Magne and Adolf Tschudin how to make masks by moulding together multiple layers of paper strips. The first moulded masks made their appearance in Basel in 1921 when Rudin was commissioned to provide masks for the Fasnachtsgesellschaft Olympia. Working in a studio in the Weisse Gasse, Magne and Tschudin continued to explore a variety of possibilities. They experimented, for example, with a mass composed of wood pulp, clay, chalk and glue. This was kneaded, rolled out and used to line the negative (as if it were a cake tin), which was then left to dry. However, these masks were very fragile and so, from 1927 on, it became conventional to work with the kind of masking paper made from wood cellulose that is normally used by house painters to protect a floor.

In about 1925 the Basel mask-making pioneers went their separate ways. Adolph Tschudin, owner of a small toy and novelties factory, specialised above all in the production of one-off masks for balls, employing artists to design and paint the models. Otto Abt was involved from the very beginning. He was followed in quick succession by the sculptors Louis Weber, Adolf Weisskopf, Carl Gutknecht, and Heiggy Müller as well as the painters Irène Zurkinden, Lotti Krauss, and Max Wilke. The successors to this first generation of mask makers after World War II numbered well over one hundred artists. Beyond Fasnacht, many of them went on to become important influences on the arts in Basel during the 20th century. New owners acquired Tschudin's mask- and flag-making business in 1984.

'Fuffi' Magne preferred to produce masks for Cliques, but he also involved artists in the manufacturing process, the sculptor Willy Hege and the painter Heinz Fiorese among them. In the 1930s, Magne dominated the market, regularly supplying masks to over two-thirds of all the city's cliques. In 1934, he invented the 'Güppi', a concealed head covering that makes wearing a mask more comfortable, and allows carnivalists to wear even larger masks. Until 1953, mask making was seasonal in nature and was run in conjunction with a painting and decorating business; since then, Fasnacht work has continued throughout the year. Early on, his son Roger learned the art of mask-making and also became a skilled lantern painter. Following the death of his father in 1965, Roger Magne decided together with his wife to keep the studio going. Today, the third generation is already active in the business.

The production method developed in the 1920s and the involvement of Basel artists in creating masks very soon made this type of artist's mask the norm. The number of workshops grew, particularly after 1945. This trade, the skill of which helps to make Basel's 'three most beautiful days of the year' such a success, employs a small army of people in various studios for at least six months of the year.

Artists' masks

Clown with beard, Studio Alphonse Magne | Basel, Switzerland | around 1932 | cardboard | Hans Fischer, gifted in 1977 | VI 46405

Mask 'Alti Dante', model by Adolf Tschudin, painted by Lotti Krauss | Basel, Switzerland | 1931 | paper, paint | Adolf Tschudin, gifted in 1932 | VI 11186

Larve 'Schnippsi', model by Adolf Tschudin, painted by Irène Zurkinden | Basel, Switzerland | 1932 | paper, paint | Adolf Tschudin, gifted in 1932 | VI 11187

Mask face with skyward nose and moustache, model by Max Kämpf | Basel, Switzerland | 1948 | paper, paint | Valery Maier-Heussler, gifted in 1969 | VI 36545

Mask face with sideburns | Basel, Switzerland | around 1930 | paper | Theodor Burckhardt-Sarasin, gifted in 1981 | VI 53779

Mask face with crooked nose, formed by Heiggy Müller | Basel, Switzerland | 1936 | paper, paint | Heinrich Müller, gifted in 1960 | VI 26971

Mask with crooked face, formed by Heiggy Müller | Basel, Switzerland | 1935 | paper, bristles | Heinrich Müller, gifted in 1960 | VI 26973

Mask face with long nose, formed by Heiggy Müller | Basel, Switzerland | 1936 | paper | Heinrich Müller, gifted in 1960 | VI 26978

Mask face with twisted nose, formed by Heiggy Müller | Basel, Switzerland | 1936 | wood, paper, textile, wire | Heinrich Müller, gifted in 1960 | VI 26972

Mask 'Kindlifrässer', produced by Valery Maier-Heussler | Basel, Switzerland | 1957 | cardboard, paper, glass | feathers | Valery Maier-Heussler, gifted in 1960 | VI 26965

Mask with four teeth, produced by Valery Maier-Heussler | Basel, Switzerland | 1957 | paper | Valery Maier-Heussler, gifted in 1960 | VI 26966

Children's mask, formed by Otto Abt | Basel Switzerland | around 1935 | paper | Heinrich Müller, gifted in 1960 | VI 26975

Early Basel masks

Carnival mask 'Alti Dante', modelled and painted by Heiggy Müller, Studio Adolf Tschudin | Basel, Switzerland | 1929 | paper, paint | Adolf Tschudin, gifted in 1932 | VI 11189

Mask 'Waggis' by Adolf Tschudin | Basel, Switzerland | 1925 | wood, paint | Adolf Tschudin, gifted in 1932 | VI 11184

Mask 'Waggis' with luminous paint, modelled by Adolf Tschudin | Basel Switzerland | 1922 | paper, paint | Adolf Tschudin, gifted in 1932 | VI 11185

Drum majors' masks from Atelier Alphonse Magne

Drum major's mask 'sig.: Dr. Riggerbagg' on the Sujet 'Zighus fällt' of the Breo-Clique 1896 [Reference to Curator of Monuments Dr. Rudolf Riggerbach, who tried in vain to save the old armoury from being replaced by the new university building] | Basel, Switzerland | 1937 | paper, lamb skin | Hans Fischer, gifted in 1977 | VI 46402

Drum major's mask 'Fudi-Fischer' on the Sujet 'Z Basel a mym Rhy, muess e Kuntschmuseum sy' of the Breo-Clique 1896 [featuring the German architect Fischer], produced by Hans Fischer | Basel, Switzerland | 1936 | paper, paint | Hans Fischer, gifted in 1977 | VI 46404

18 The Waggis

This apparition in a blue farmer's smock is one of the classic Basel Fasnacht figures. Characterised by an outsize nose, the Waggis only began to appear in its present form in around the year 1950.

Nevertheless, the earliest pictorial record of this figure at Basel Fasnacht dates from 1874. The word 'Waggis', in contrast, has been traced back to the late 1830s, when it appeared in a humorous French genre painting entitled 'Physionomie du Wagges'.

The origin of the name is uncertain. As 'Waggis' is used pejoratively of any uncouth vagabond, but also of a male from Alsace – or more narrowly, its Sundgau region – one explanation links it to the Latin 'vagus' (roving, wandering) and presumes it is derived from (German) thieves' cant. Others think it means someone from the Vosges Mountains ('Wasgenwald'), or refers to the men who used to work there as woodcutters and charcoal burners. The end syllable of "is" tends to indicate scorn, as noted in other words such as the Basel dialect term 'Binggis' (squirt, snip).

It was only after a young Prussian Lieutenant – serving in Zabern (Saverne) in 1913 – by the name of von Forstner addressed Alsatian soldiers as 'Ihr Wackes!', that this harmless and affectionate local term became a form of abuse when used by non-Alsatians. Forstner's pejorative use of the word led to the 'Zabern Incident' which was marked by debates in the Reichstag and vitriolic attacks in France. In the end, the official representative of the German Reich had to step down and the minister of state handed in his resignation. This incident on the eve of the First World War stirred up Alsatian-German resentment to new heights.

Waggis mask and top | Basel, Switzerland | 21st c. | paper, textile, raffia | private loan

Waggis mask 'Zweier', produced by Atelier 'nase' | Basel, Switzerland | 1953 | paper, paint | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1953 | VI 20563

Waggis mask, produced by Werner Winter in Atelier Magne | Basel, Switzerland | um 1950 | paper, paint | Werner Winter, gifted in 1953 | VI 19962

Waggis mask 'Sprungschanze', designed by Otto Plattner, produced by Atelier Métraux-Bucherer | Basel, Switzerland 1937 | canvas, oil paint | Max Bucherer, gifted in 1941 | VI 16082

Reproduction of a postcard 'Basler Fastnacht' | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1910 | paper | Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer Collection, bequest in 1938 | VI 12969

Reproductions of postcards from the postcard collection of MKB

19 Dr Masggi – a bygone delight

Masked balls used to be a great tradition in Basel. They were held on the Monday and Wednesday of Fasnacht, particularly lavish ones being those organised in the Stadt-Casino (which opened in 1826) and in the city theatre (opened in 1834). In the second half of the 19th century, these traditional events received competition from a growing number of new fancy dress balls that were staged in guild halls and breweries as well as in the Kunsthalle restaurant. The Quodlibet club organized a ball in the Café Spitz which, in 1885, shifted venue to the Casino Music Hall.

In many cases, generous prizes served as an incentive for lively masked revels. Rather less enthusiasm was expressed – at least by the police chief – when it was discovered as long ago as 1853 that many ladies of dubious reputation had been taking the train from Mulhouse to

Basel to participate in Fasnacht balls. Children's balls were immensely popular, too. These were held on Fasnacht Tuesday in all the major restaurants in town.

The last flowering of Basel's masked ball tradition emerged in the 1920s, with events taking place in almost every public establishment. In those years, almost all public venues put on fancy events. From 1927, the masked balls at the Muba, which clocked up to 2,000 entries on a single evening, became a leading feature. Interest waned steadily from the early 1960s onwards and the balls finally ceased after the 'Kehraus' (farewell celebration) in 1971.

Also worth to mention is the legendary „Zyschtigsfescht“ (Tuesday Festival) of the artist group „33“ with many famous painters of lanterns, designer of masks etc.

Picture 'In der Höhli' by Heiri Strub [In memory of the legendary <Tuesday balls> organized by the artist group '33' in the Kunsthalle restaurant] | Basel, Switzerland | 1952 | varnish, oil on Hessian | Heiri Strub, purchased in 2000 | VI 69555

Studio photos of visitors to masked balls by Bruno Kugler | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1920 | paper | Georg Weniger-Müller, gifted in 1977 | VI 48374-78

Drawing 'Der Kinderkarneval im Casino zu Basel', after a sketch by Carl Huth in 'Allgemeine Illustrierte Zeitung' No. 21, p. 393, 1870 | Theo Gantner, gifted in 1980 | VI 51812

Two portrait pictures of Höflinger / Hofmann | Basel, Switzerland | around 1900 | photographs | old collection

Menu card from the masked ball at the Casino | Basel, Switzerland, 1887 | paper | old collection

Designs for fancy-dress ball costumes by Lily Hecker | Basel, Switzerland | around 1960 | paper, pen and ink drawing, gouache, dry point, collage, mixed technique | Lily Hecker, gifted in 1987 | VI 61251

20 Masks from atelier 'nase'

Between 1946 and 1956, the graphic artist Heiri Strub (born in 1916) joined forces with his wife Lotti and some of their friends to run the 'nase' mask-making studio. Their clientele was primarily composed of people taking part in Fasnacht as individuals ('Einzelmasken') and devotees of the masked balls.

In 1951, the artist Alexander Zschokke, whose brother was Minister of Education, painted a public mural of a blacksmith who resembled Stalin. This was satirized at the following Fasnacht by a young man from an important Basel family. The impacted family were not impressed and managed to find out the name of this man. As a result, he never participated in any procession again.

Mask 'Rüebli' | Basel, Switzerland | 1953 | paper, paint | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1953 | VI 20562

Mask 'Kätzli' | Basel, Switzerland | 1953 | paper, paint, textile | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1953 | VI 20561

Mask 'Schutzbläch' | Basel, Switzerland | 1953 | paper, paint, fur | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1953 | VI 20560

Model 'Chummscho' by Heiri Strub [worn as lone masked figure <Schwitzwiler>] | Basel, Switzerland | 1948 | paper, textile | Georges Weniger-Müller, gifted in 1999 | VI 69325

Masks 'Regierungsrat Peter Zschokke' and 'Bildhauer Alexander Zschokke' | Basel, Switzerland | 1951 | paper | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1991 | VI 64704, VI 64705

Mask 'Tante Sabine' | Basel, Switzerland | 1953 | paper, textile, wire | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1953 | VI 20558

Mask 'Kümmerli' | Basel, Switzerland | 1953 | paper, wire, fur | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1953 | VI 20559

Mask 'Kümmerli' | Basel, Switzerland | around 1950 | paper, paint | Karl Haldimann, gifted in 1989 | VI 63594

Mask 'Schuehlöffeli' | Basel, Switzerland | 1953 | paper, textile, hair | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1953 | VI 20557

Mask 'Pfrüender' | Basel, Switzerland | 1953 | paper | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1953 | VI 20556

Mask 'Jeeggeli' | Basel, Switzerland | 1953 | paper, paint | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1953 | VI 20553

Mask 'Dr. h. c. Guschi Wängg' [Governing Councillor Gustav Wenk] | Basel, Switzerland | 1950 | paper | Karl Haldimann, gifted in 1989 | VI 63593

21 'Larve' versus 'Maske'

At the Basel Fasnacht, the head-masks participants wear – often designated as 'second face' – are not referred to by the usual German term 'Maske' but by the more special term 'Larve', literally meaning a larva, and thus suggesting the notion of transformation, or metamorphosis. In the Basel dialect a 'Maske' means a fully masked figure including head-mask and costume. In Basel, the making of 'Larve' is given particular attention and is in the hands of special mask studios.

The number and variety of 'Larve' one encounters at the Morgenstreich, the afternoon parades, and the nightly processions ('gässle') through the alleyways of the old part of town is truly amazing. There aren't just the classical Harlequin, Pierrot, Bajass, Waggis or Alti Dante, but also many imaginative creations that seize on a specific, current Sujet usually in a satirizing manner.

In this room works of a whole series of Basel's mask studios of the 1930s to 1970s are represented, including Tschudin, Magne, Gysin, Strub, Merian, and others.

Four parade masks for the J.B.-Clique Santihans, designed by August Merian-Gerster | Basel, Switzerland | paper, various materials | Doris Straumann, gifted in 2003:

Drummer's mask 'erotisch-sensationsgluschtigi Schwyzeraffe' for the Sujet 'Dr erotisch illustrierti Schwyzerbletli-Käas' | 1958 | VI 69903

Drummer's mask 'abverheiti Fascht-Auti-Bsitzer', for the Sujet 'Dopplet oder nyt' | 1959 | VI 69904

Drummer's mask 'sin die ewig bsch ... aidene – kasch dreymool roote' for the Sujet 'Konsum's verworje Kundefang' | 1960 | VI 69905

Drummer's mask swine with jester's cap 'sinn die, wo-n-is wänn d'Basler Fasnacht ver"sau"e' for the Sujet 's schweebelet im Comité (oder: Wolle mer se nei lasse?)' | 1968 | VI 69906

Drum major's mask 'De Gaulle-Hirsch' for the Sujet 'd Franzoose-Wuche' of the clique Vereinigte Kleinbasler VKB 1884 | Basel, Switzerland | 1966 | paper, paint, textile | Werner Bossert, gifted in 1977 | VI 46394

Drummer's mask 'Sultan' | Basel, Switzerland | around 1985 | paper, paint, textile | Peter Hanauer, gifted in 1998, VI 69244

Drummer's mask 'Hornochs' for the Sujet 'd Wiener walze' of the Fasnachtsgesellschaft Olympia 1908 | Basel, Switzerland | paper, wool | 1935 | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70726

Mask 'Alti Dante' with hat 'Schute' | Basel, Switzerland | around 1960 | paper, velvet, silk, wax, cloth, paper, wood, metal, nylon, feather, lace | Sylvia Stieger, gifted in 1973, VI 41803a

Mask 'Onassis', formed by Ruedi Schmid, painted by Faustina Iselin, produced by Atelier Tschudin | Basel, Switzerland 1969 | paper | Evi and Thomas Keller-Bühler, gifted in 1970 | VI 37005

Drummer's mask 'De Gaulle als alte Tante', formed by Ruedi Schmid, painted by Faustina Iselin | Basel, Switzerland | 1968 | paper | Evi and Thomas Keller-Bühler, gifted in 1970 | VI 37003

Vanguard mask 'Fäärimaa Städeli' for Die Abverheyte, designed by Thomas Keller, produced by Atelier Tschudin | Basel, Switzerland | 1969 | paper | Evi and Thomas Keller-Bühler, gifted in 1970 | VI 37004

Drummer's mask 'Denkmalpflieger Dr. Rudolf Rigggenbach' for the Sujet 'S isch zem Schiessel!' of the Fasnachtsgesellschaft Olympia 1908, model by Louis Weber | Basel, Switzerland | before 1972 | paper, paint, felt, straw | Georg Duthaler, gifted in 1974 | VI 43168

Parade mask 'Eugen A. Meier' for Die Aagfrässene | Basel Switzerland | ca 1985 | paper | Die Aagfrässene, gifted in 1988 | VI 62538

Masks for the Sujet 'S nej Antike-Museum' of the clique Vereinigte Kleinbasler VKB 1884, designed by Hans Weidmann, produced by Atelier Tschudin:

Drum major's mask 'dr letscht Zentaur' | Basel, Switzerland | 1961 | paper, various materials | Werner Bossert, gifted in 1970 | VI 36963

Drummer's mask 'archaische Rariteete' | Basel, Switzerland | 1961 | paper, various materials | Erwin Jäggi, gifted in 1970 | VI 37017

Piper's mask 'antiki Pfunzle' | Basel, Switzerland | 1961 | paper, various materials | Erwin Jäggi, gifted in 1970 | VI 37018

Float mask | Basel, Switzerland | 1961 | paper, various materials | Arnold Rais, gifted in 1970 | VI 37019

Masks for lone maskers from various ateliers

Two masks, created by Yvonne Binz | Basel, Switzerland | 1970 | paper | Yvonne Binz, gifted in 1970 | VI 37050-51

Mask with overlong eyelashes, produced by Larvenatelier Plüss | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1935 | paper | Paul Hugger, purchased in 1982 | VI 56522

Mask, painted by Faustina Iselin | Basel, Switzerland | 1967 | paper, paint | Adolf Tschudin, purchased in 1968 | VI 36416

Mask of the Rumpel Clique 1923 | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1950 | paper | Dominik Wunderlin, gifted in 1987 | VI 61419

Mask with hat and plastic skeleton 'Sensemann', Atelier Adolf Tschudin | Basel, Switzerland | 1950-1960 | paper, paint, felt, plastic | Frank Weiss-Bleuel, gifted in 1999 | VI 69316

Mask with eyelashes, produced by Larvenatelier Gysin | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1950 | paper | Reimund Adamczyk, purchased in 1987 | VI 61315

Mask with raised eyebrows | Basel, Switzerland | before 1940 | cardboard | purchased in 1940, vendor unknown | VI 15666

Mask 'Stier' | Basel, Switzerland | 1950-1960 | paper, paint | Frank Weiss-Bleuel, gifted in 1999 | VI 69322

Mask with stubbles | Basel, Switzerland | 1950-1960 | paper, paint | Frank Weiss-Bleuel, gifted in 1999 | VI 69320

Costume with piper's mask 'Badisches Dienstmädchen' for the Sujet 'Hoim ins Roich' of the Lälli-Clique 1902, production Atelier Alphonse Magne | Basel, Switzerland | 1939 | textile, felt | Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, permanent loan 1939 | VI 15585-91

22 Mise en scène of carnival pub

Selected objects

Requisite 'd'Standpauke' | Basel, Switzerland | 2nd half of 20th c. | wood, paint | old collection

Requisite 'Salami auf Rollschuh' | Basel, Switzerland | 2nd half of 20th c. | textile, metal, paint | Kuttlebutzer, gifted in 2005 | VI 70086

Schnitzelbangg 'd Kaffimihli' | Basel, Switzerland | end of 20th c. | paper, textile | private loan

Group photo of Fasnachtsgesellschaft Olympia 1908 featuring the Sujet 'd Wiener walze' | Basel, Switzerland | 1935 | paper, wood | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70737

Woodcut 'Viertel ab vier' by Heiri Strub | Basel, Switzerland | 1952 | paper, glass | Heiri Strub, gifted in 1953 | VI 20552

Lithograph 'Chaise mit Waggis und Elsässerin' by Niklaus Stoecklin | Basel, Switzerland | 20th c. | paper | Dominik Wunderlin, gifted in 2022 | VI 72338

Carnival figures, designed by Max Linder, realized by André Chapallaz, painted by René Bernasconi | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1952-1959 | ceramic, emulsion paint | Ruth and Andreas Bothe-Staehelin, purchased in 2001 | VI 69620.01-07

Parade badges, issued by the Fasnachts-Comité | Basel, Switzerland | 1988, 1996, 1990, 1999, 2000q | copper | old collection

Schnitzelbangg 's Goldveegeli', design by Thomas Keller, painted by Alex Maier, realized by Atelier Tschudin | Basel, Switzerland | 1956 | paper, paint, textile | Evi and Thomas Keller-Bühler, gifted in 1970 | VI 37002

Collage by Fritz Achermann | Basel, Switzerland | no date | wood, paper, paint, metal | on loan Peter Achermann Collection

Lithograph '25 Jahre Comité Schnitzelbänke!' by Niklaus Stoecklin | Basel, Switzerland | around 1947 | paper | Rudolf Baumgartner-Remund, gifted in 2010 | VI 70736

Heraldic disk designs for the clique 'Alti Steinlemer' by Fritz Grogg | Basel, Switzerland | 1945 | Papier | old collection

Display object 'Fasnachtsumzug' | Basel, Switzerland | ca 1936 | wood | Hans Fischer, gifted in 1977 | VI 46397

Display figures drum major and two lantern carriers, realized by Samuel Buser-Knöll | Basel, Switzerland | 1933 | plaster | Samuel Buser-Knöll, purchased 1933 | VI 11383-85

Lantern by Ferdy Afflerbach | Basel, Switzerland | 2nd half of 20th c. | cloth, paint, wood, metal | Kuttlebutzer, gifted in 2005 | VI 70077

«Ai du scheene Schnitzelbangg..»

A selected overview of the production of the Basler Schnitzelbängg, mid-20th century to the present.

Perversarelin (1945)

Kuttlebutzer (1953)

Doggter h.c. (1961-1967)

Anggebliemli (1973)

Zytigs-Anni (1974)

Standpauke (1974)

Schorsch vom Hafebeggi 2 (1987-1994)

Gluggersegg (1994)

Zahnstocher (1996-1997)
Peperoni (1996-2000)
Heiri (2013)
Stroossewischer (2003, 2015)
Singvogel (2013)
Doggder FMH (2015)

Excerpts from various CD productions of the Basel Carnival

Quotes in the exhibition

The worst that can happen to anyone at Fasnacht is not to be born and bred in Basel!
(Hanns U. Christen, alias “-sten”, journalist)

Whereas in the 19th century it was ‘Prince Carneval’ who headed the parades, today’s carnival cliques welcome ‘Mrs Fasnacht’ to the Morgenstreich.
(Gabriela Imboden, historian, 1998)

Not few people in Basel see a parallel between Fasnacht and the brevity of life itself.
(Olga V. Cieslarová, cultural researcher, 2022)

The true hallmark of the Basel Fasnacht are the afternoon and nightly drum processions. Drumming is not merely a concomitant to carnival; it is its whole purpose.
(Carl Spitteler, winner of Nobel Prize for Literature, 1888)

Basel’s Fasnacht appears to me to be like the universe: it keeps on expanding.
(Georg Bienz, Dr. h.c., geographer, 1998)

‘Schnitzelbank’ songs are a different story; they have satirists licking their fingers.
(Heinrich Wiesner, author, 1994)

You don’t get any closer to the people of Basel than at Fasnacht – so, too, in art.
(Jean Tinguely, artist, 1979)

A wit once quipped that picking their nose was the closest some people came to penetrating the mysteries of the mind; the people of Basel, in contrast, cultivate Fasnacht...
(Peter F. Kopp, historian, 1974)

Famous artists do not consider it beneath their dignity to create an army of masks using readily mouldable papier-mâché.
(Walter Escher, folk studies scholar, 1954)

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