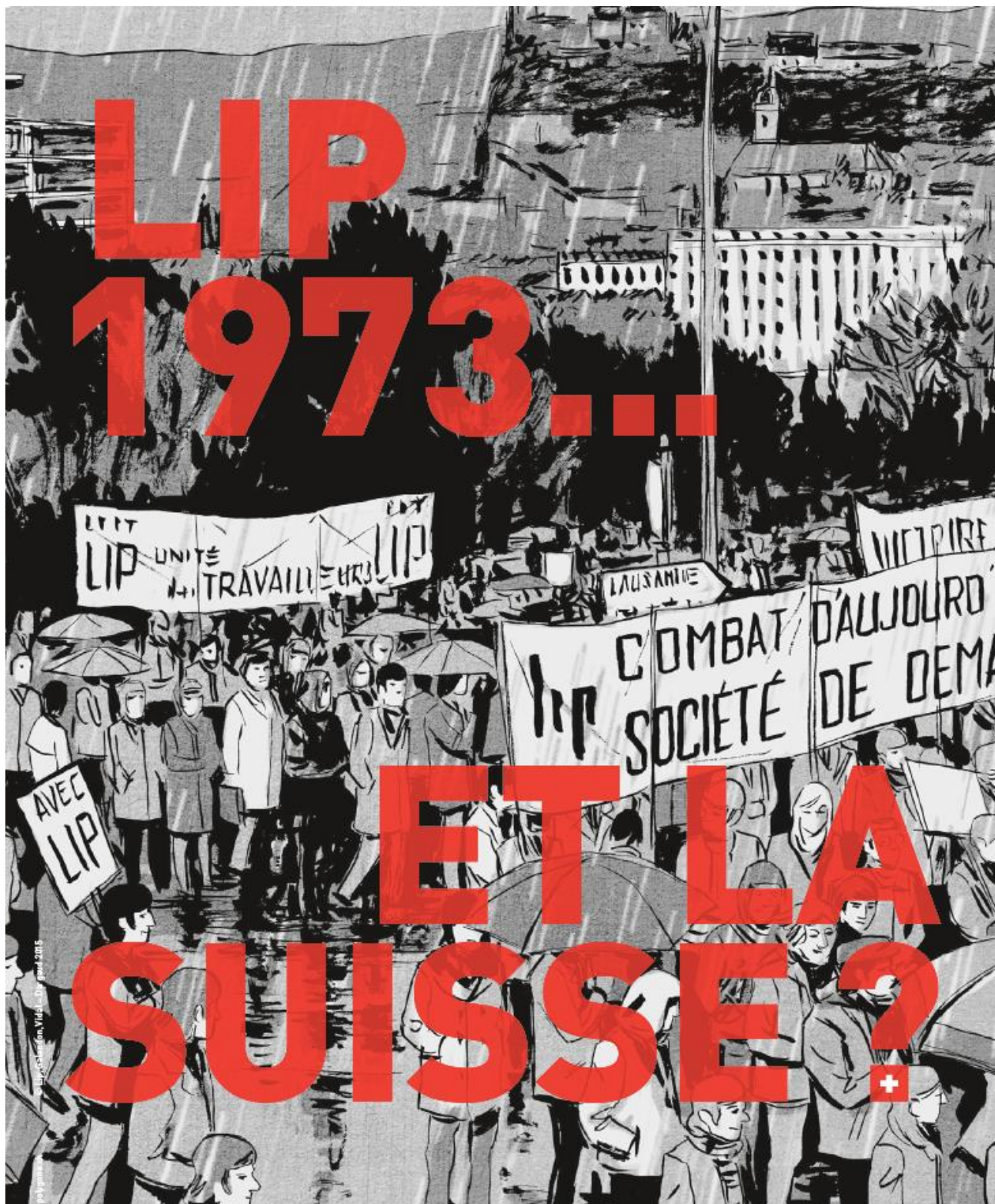


LIP 1973... AND SWITZERLAND?

PRESS RELEASE



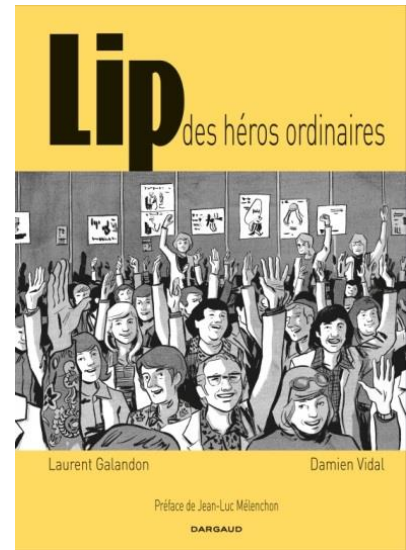
MUSÉE INTERNATIONAL
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LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS • SUISSE

Lip 1973... And Switzerland?

Today, the name Lip is still associated with the social movement which affected the Besançon-based watchmaking company LIP in the 1970s. Its effects were felt far beyond its borders.

To coincide with the release of the comic strip *Lip, des héros ordinaires* ["LIP, everyday heroes"] (Vidal & Galandon, Dargaud 2014), the exhibition *Lip 1973... And Switzerland?* retraces the history of the Lip company and looks into how the conflict was received in Switzerland, alongside its impact on the Swiss watchmaking industry.



The Lip affair, a swiss affair?

The exhibition is designed to highlight Switzerland's involvement in the watchmaking history of Lip, by looking at the technical, industrial, commercial, financial and social aspects. Visitors travel beyond Swiss borders on a step-by-step journey through Switzerland's involvement in French watchmaking and explore the repercussions of the affair within Switzerland through an exhibition of some of Lip's iconic watches, rare timepieces and archive documents

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Lip, a jewel of French watchmaking



Lip R27 Jupiter, 1960, vws.fr /
jc guyon expert cea (photo:
MIH)

Lip's history started as a watch trading office, set up in Besançon by Emmanuel Lipmann in 1867. Lip became a public limited company in 1893. By the end of the 19th century, Société Anonyme d'Horlogerie Lipmann Frères was also distributing watches equipped with Swiss calibres.

Lip was part of a huge boom in the research, development and commercialisation of non-mechanical movements. In 1952, it unveiled the first electronic watch to the world (R27).

Lip was an early adopter of advertising and sponsoring to ensure its name was known. The impact of its advertising was without parallel in French watchmaking. Lip was an innovator in terms of product packaging, distribution and after-sales.

"We make them, we sell them, we pay ourselves!"

The social conflict which affected Lip in spring 1973 had its origins in entrepreneurial, economic, industrial and technological factors.

In the 1960s, Lip registered a dozen patents in the field of quartz watches, but scarcely commercialised a single product.



Usine Lip Jean Zay, 1973. J.P. Danain, private collection

Despite demonstrating a strong attachment to the independence of his company, Fred Lip open its capital to the Swiss group Ebauches SA in 1967. This group held 43% of its shares in 1973, ensuring it was a key player in the coming conflict.

In the spring of 1973, the social conflict grew apace. On 12th June, the employees seized a stock of watches, completed their assembly and sold them in the months that followed. By practising a form of self-management, the watchmakers in Besançon made the Lip affair one of the most important social conflicts of the 20th century.

After several demonstrations, sometimes put down with force, the mobilisation reached its culmination on 29th September 1973. The "march on Besançon" saw 80,000 to 100,000 people join together under driving rain. A social revolution was taking place that went beyond the Lip affair.

On 11th March 1974, after 329 days of strike, 130 workers went back to their posts. One year later, all staff were rehired.



© Lip, Galandon-Vidal, Dargaud 2014



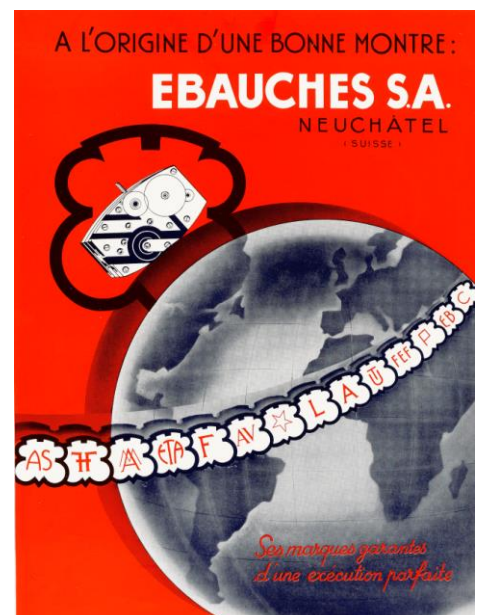
Lip Mach 2000, design R. Tallon, 1975, vws.fr/jc_guyon_expert_cea (photo: MIH)

Design

From 1975, under the aegis of Claude Neuschwander, entrepreneur and publicist, Lip hired designers to create its new models. The Mach 2000 range of watches was the work of Roger Tallon (1929-2011), a pioneering industrial designer responsible for the current TGVs.

Ebauches SA

Ebauches SA was created in Neuchâtel in 1926 by the merger of manufacturers (Fontainemelon, A. Schild, Ad. Michel) which controlled 75% of the country's production of blanks. Between 1927 and 1929, no fewer than 27 manufacturers joined their fold. This group held 43% of Lip's shares in 1970.



Ad Ebauches SA, 1940. De Coulon

Lip and Switzerland, Lip in Switzerland



FAN L'Express, J.-P. Baillod, 1973

On 18th May 1973, 150 demonstrators took to the streets of Neuchâtel, where Ebauches SA was based. The demonstration aimed to draw media attention to the plight of Lip personnel. Sixty-five cars crossed the border at six different locations so as not to raise suspicions at border controls.

How should the Swiss workers at Ebauches SA react to the threat of redundancy facing their colleagues in Besançon?

Take to the streets?

Go on strike, since the production facilities were in the same hands?

Something has changed!

The Lip protest left an indelible mark in the Besançon region, but its effects were felt farther afield. Similar attempts to seize control were also seen in Switzerland. Bulova, occupied by its staff for eleven days, remains the most significant social movement in the post-war watchmaking industry. On 21st January 1976, almost 4000 people demonstrated alongside the strikers who were occupying the factory to prevent its relocation. Bulova left Neuchâtel in 1976, ultimately leaving Switzerland altogether in 1982.



Bulova Accutron, v. 1960 (MIH)

Practical information

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