

Visitor information

Museum Langmatt Baden
Foundation Langmatt Sidney und Jenny Brown

LANGMATT



Museum Langmatt, exhibition view *Léopold Rabus*, 2017

Museum Langmatt

From today's perspective, Langmatt in the early 20th century was one of the most important concentrations of modernism in Switzerland: within a few years, Sidney and Jenny Brown-Sulzer accumulated one of the most significant collections of French Impressionist work.

At the time, these artworks were part of contemporary art and by no means generally accepted – a fact that serves to emphasise the astonishing pioneering work of the Browns. As one of the founding families of the former BBC (today ABB), they kept an open house during the first decades of the 20th century, receiving numerous guests, artists, and musicians.

In 1990, Stiftung Langmatt opened the doors of the Art Nouveau villa, built by Karl Moser, to the public. The Museum Langmatt – a distinctive ensemble of architecture, art collection, and park – is unique within Switzerland. It houses the most valuable trove of art within the canton of Aargau, comprising a collection of around 50 Impressionist paintings. This museum of Impressionist art and of living fascinates members of the public of all ages, with its periodically renewed exhibitions, multi-faceted events, and insights into upper-class living during the Belle Époque era. At its heart are exhibitions that regularly place contemporary art in relation to the collection and create new ways of communicating art.



Sidney W. and Jenny Brown with their three sons, circa 1906

The patron's family

The Brown industrialist family in Baden

In 1891, the inventor and engineer Charles Eugene Lancelotti Brown (1863–1924) joined Walter Boveri to found the Baden firm of Brown, Boveri & Cie. (BBC). His brother, Sidney William Brown (1865–1941), also moved to Baden, where he worked as a technical director and delegate for the administrative board of the BBC company. The two brothers were the children of the English engineer Charles Brown Senior (1827–1905) and Winterthur citizen Eugenie Pfau (1845–1929). The firm soon began to flourish, and developed into a global business (known as ABB since 1988).

The Brown family at Villa Langmatt

In 1896, Sidney W. Brown married art-lover Jenny Sulzer (1871–1968), daughter of the head of the Winterthur company Gebrüder Sulzer AG. The couple had the Villa Langmatt built in 1899–1901, and accumulated an impressive art collection. Sidney W. and Jenny Brown and their three sons supported many artists and musicians of the era, and led a lively social life centred on the Villa Langmatt.

The patron

The middle son of the husband-and-wife art collectors, John Alfred Brown (born in 1900), died in 1987, as the last heir of the family name. Like his brothers Sidney Hamlet (1898–1970) and Harry Frank (1905–1972), he died childless. He bequeathed the Villa Langmatt to the city of Baden together with its furnishings and valuable art collection, stipulating in his will that the ensemble should be turned into a museum. The city of Baden duly founded the public foundation "Stiftung Langmatt Sidney und Jenny Brown" (the patron having requested that the foundation be named after his parents). In 1990, the doors of the Museum Langmatt were opened to the public for the first time.

The architecture

The building principals and architect of the Villa Langmatt

The Villa Langmatt was founded in 1899–1901 on a site known as the “lange Matte” by the architect Karl Moser (1860–1936) for the married couple Sidney and Jenny Brown–Sulzer. The architect hailed from Baden, and ran an architecture firm jointly with Robert Curjel (1859–1925) in Karlsruhe. In Karl Moser, the Browns had engaged a notable architect who is today considered to be a major exponent of Swiss modernist architecture.



The Villa Langmatt and its gardens, post-1906

The Villa Langmatt in the Baden context

Prior to Langmatt, Karl Moser had built two villas in Baden for the company founders of Brown, Boveri & Cie. (today known as ABB): the “Villa Boveri” (1896/97) and – close by – the “Römerburg” for Charles E.L. Brown (1897/98, demolished in 1957). His buildings laid the foundation for the rise of the Basel villa quarter, which, during this period, became a centre of progressive Swiss architecture.

The many styles of the Villa Langmatt

The original villa united various stylistic elements, such as the English country house and the German Art Nouveau style, on a modern floor plan. The original interior fittings were created by Karl Moser and by the German ceramicist Max Laeuger (1864–1952) – including the fountain in the cafeteria, which remains today. The villa’s systems are also interesting, such as the fully-preserved bath dating from 1901 (on the first storey). For the picture gallery, which is also built by Karl Moser (1904–06), the Browns chose a style with a rather classicist quality. The 1920s ushered in a phase of comprehensive “Gallicisation”, particularly in the villa’s interior fittings.

The gardens of the Villa Langmatt

The park-like garden complex was laid out circa 1900 by Curjel and Moser, in collaboration with the garden architect Otto Froebel (1844–1906). They were based on English models, and have been changed and altered several times. In particular, French stylistic elements were added in the 1920s. In 1941, structural redesigns to the garden largely came to a halt. Today, the garden is planted according to historic conservation principles.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *The Braid*, ca. 1886/87
oil on canvas, 57 x 47 cm

The art collections

An early passion for contemporary art

The owners of the Villa Langmatt, Sidney William Brown and Jenny Brown-Sulzer, bought the first two pictures – one of which was Eugène Boudin's *Lavandières sur les bords de la Touques* of 1895 (Kat. 7) – on their honeymoon journey to Paris in 1896. They soon began to collect contemporary art more intensively. Jenny Brown, who had been a painter herself in her youth and had informed herself on the subject, developed a particularly enduring passion for art. Around the turn of the century, the Browns undertook a number of art-related journeys. They also supported contemporary artists, especially in Munich.

The “Munich” collection

The first art movement significantly collected by the Browns was the Munich Secession; they collected artworks by Franz von Stuck, Leo Putz, and Julius Exter. To house these large-format pictures, the couple had a gallery hall built in the villa by Karl Moser in 1904/05. However, the owners disposed of most of their Munich Secession pictures before the First World War, to pursue their new passion for the French Impressionists.

An early Impressionist art collection in Switzerland

From 1908 onwards, the Browns took advice from the Winterthur painter and art agent Carl Montag (1880–1956), gradually acquiring paintings by Gauguin, Renoir, Pissarro, Monet, Sisley, Cassat, and Cézanne from Paris galleries and collections. This gave rise to one of Switzerland's first and most significant collections of Impressionist art.

A late interest in the 18th century

Circa 1920, the Browns developed a marked interest in the France of the 18th century. They went to great lengths to acquire a picture by Fragonard (*Young Girl with Cat*, Kat.47). In parallel, they collected exquisite French furniture from the 18th and 19th centuries and a series of Venetian veduta pictures (18th century). In the early 1930s, they returned to early Modernist artists, purchasing a number of artworks by Boudin, Corot and Cézanne.

Valuable art and craft work

Aside from the paintings and a small number of sculptures, the Browns also collected furniture from different epochs and antique silver and porcelain. They accumulated a remarkable collection of Chinese ceramics ranging from the Han Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty. These objects are in themselves an important part of the many layered and multifaceted Brown collection, which can still be seen in the Museum Langmatt to this day.



Paul Cézanne, *Fruit and Sugar Bowl*, ca. 1877–1880,
oil on canvas, 24 x 33,5 cm

Camille Pissarro, *Boulevard Montmartre, Spring*, 1897,
oil on canvas, 46,2 x 55 cm

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Tue – Fr 2 pm – 5 pm
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