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Eyewear

Past, present and future –
vision aid and fashion accessory

Special exhibition from 15 October 2011 until 9 April 2012
in the Doll's House Museum Basel

With its second special exhibition in the current year, the Doll's House Museum Basel is turning its gaze on the history of an everyday object: spectacles. The exhibition is divided into seven areas that give a clear picture of the past, present and future of vision aids. Among the items on show are spectacles worn by Elton John, Marilyn Monroe and other stars. Creative activities for children and adults turn a visit to the museum into an entertaining and informative time.

The exhibition.
The exhibition takes visitors around the world on a journey through time. It tells the story of the first vision aids in ancient Syria, China and Europe and documents the development of spectacles from a misshapen vision aid to a fashionable accessory. The fact that spectacles are also objets d'art is demonstrated in the thematic areas "Eyewear and art" and "The future".
One highlight of the exhibition is sure to be the spectacles belonging to famous stars. These include twenty spectacles of Sir Elton John's, two once worn by the unforgettable film icon Marilyn Monroe, one from Arthur Schopenhauer and one from Swiss ski-jumping legend Simon Ammann. Among those represented is a prominent Basel personality as well: 31 spectacles belonging to the eccentric Basel couturier Fred Spillmann are also on display.

The special exhibition in the Doll's House Museum is divided into seven thematic areas and presents more than 500 objects. Film presentations, spectacles sampling, free workshops for children and an eyewear competition provide the perfect complement to this entertaining and informative exhibition for young and old.

The history of spectacles.

The invention of spectacles was a huge cultural leap forward for mankind. After 700 years of "development", being able to buy the spectacles that perfectly meet our requirements, choosing from an almost inexhaustible diversity, is something we now take for granted. It has not always been the case. In earlier times, vision aids were miniature works of art of the spectacle-makers' trade, reserved for a very small number of people.

Optics in ancient times.

Various sources indicate that the Phoenicians, Chinese and Romans were familiar with magnifying vision aids, although this has not been proven to date. Eyeglasses shaped like our modern spectacles are believed to have been worn in China as jewellery and a remedy for eye diseases as long ago as 500 AD.
In Greece, polished hemispheres that could be used to enlarge scripts were made of quartz or glass around 2000 BC. According to our current understanding, however, these hemispheres were more probably used to decorate swords, sceptres and clothing. It has long been held that the Roman Emperor Nero was the first person to wear spectacles. This belief was based on his short-sightedness and a sentence written by the famous author Pliny ("Nero watched the gladiator fights through an emerald."). Recent research has shown, however, that in ancient times spectacles had not yet been invented; the knowledge of optics did not exist. Nero probably used the emerald to shield his eyes against the intense sunlight in the arena.

The High Middle Ages.

The 13th century is regarded as the century of culture, science and religious renewal. Monastic orders disseminated their culture throughout Europe. Scientific knowledge on the refraction of light introduced from Arabic-Islamic science, laid the foundation for the invention of spectacles. Monks from Western Europe utilised the findings of Ibn al-Haitham to make super-hemispherical plano-convex lenses which were laid flat-side down on scripts, enlarging them considerably.

Roger Bacon (1214–1294) recognised the importance of the reading stones and improved them. The principal raw materials were quartz, rock crystal and semi-precious stones, the so-called beryls. These gave rise to the German word for spectacles: "Brille".
Towards the end of the 13th century, the spherical segments were ground flatter and worn closer to the eye. To protect the lenses and make them easier to handle, they were given a frame and joined together.
It is believed that spectacles were invented in a monastery in northern Italy in 1280. With the glassworks in Murano, Italy possessed the most important centre for the manufacture of glass.
The oldest currently known depiction of a pair of spectacles is situated in the chapter house of the church of San Nicolo in Treviso near Venice. In 1352, Tomaso di Modena painted a portrait of Cardinal Hugo de Province with his rivet spectacles. They were made of iron, wood or horn and were held in front of the eyes. Rivet spectacles were extremely expensive, for which reason they were limited to scholars and the wealthy.
A passage from the sermon preached by the Dominican monk Giordano da Rivalto from the monastery of St. Catharine in Pisa on 23 February 1305 is one of the earliest references to the existence of spectacles: "Less than 20 years have elapsed since the discovery of the art of making spectacles with which one can see better. It is one of the best and most essential arts."

The Late Middle Ages.
The proliferation of Catholic monastic orders was accompanied by the spread of spectacles across Europe. Since only members of the clergy could read and write, spectacles were little used by the general population.
Starting in northern Italy, the spectacle-making trade also developed outside the monastery walls. Soon there were spectacle-makers in England, the Netherlands and Germany.
Some time around the second half of the 14th century, technical improvements were made to rivet spectacles. They consisted of two parts that were simply riveted together and linked two glasses with a brace or bridge. The materials used were iron, bronze, wood, leather, bone, horn and fishbone. The first bow spectacles were developed. The tedious task of holding the spectacles was quite inconvenient. Consequently, the frame was made elastic by means of slits in the bridge, enabling the vision aid to be worn comfortably on the nose.

From the reformation to the 20th century.

The invention of printing by Johannes Gutenberg in 1450 and Luther's Reformation led the common people to include Bible reading in their daily lives. The boom in book printing and the increasing spread of literacy led to a further boom in spectacle production, ushering in the mass production of the Nuremberg wire frame spectacles in the 17th century. The number of types of spectacles also began to grow as early as the 16th century. Strap spectacles, fixed to the head with a wide leather strap, and corded spectacles attached to the ear on loops appeared.

Another model was the original "hat spectacles", produced from the 15th until into the 18th century. The glasses were attached to a low-slung hat with the aid of an iron frame. The version also known as the "forehead extension spectacles" was mainly worn by women and the wealthy, on account of the fact that they seldom needed to remove their headwear when greeting people.

During the 16th century, jointed spectacles and headband spectacles were invented. The rigid connection of the lenses on the rivet spectacles was supplanted by a hinged joint. Also very popular in the 16th century was the pince nez. The two lens frames were initially simply joined with a spring clip made of iron or copper. Later a leather cushion was attached to reduce the pressure on the nose. The pince nez was in its hey-day from the 17th to the 19th century.

The 17th and early 18th centuries were marked by great scientific progress. One of the first inventions of this era was the telescope. Improvements in the lenses of telescopes and binoculars also led to higher-quality spectacle glasses. Benjamin Franklin is regarded as the inventor of bifocal glasses. In 1784, he came up with the idea of fitting different lenses for the right and left eyes: one for distance, one for close-up. The Franklin glasses named after him eliminated the need to swap between reading and distance spectacles.

In the 18th century, the lorgnon conquered the German-speaking region. It was probably derived from the inverted rivet spectacles that were already known in the 15th century and went by the name of scissor spectacles. The lorgnon is a reading aid with lenses connected by a bridge, held up to the eyes by means of a handle. A thin chain enabled the vision aid to be worn around the neck. The folding lorgnon represented a significant technical innovation. The two lenses could be folded up and re-opened when required by means of a spring. This type of spectacles proved very popular with ladies, which probably accounts for the valuable, richly decorated variations. The lorgnon is still used to this day.

The early 18th century saw the appearance of spectacles with side arms, so-called "temple spectacles" or "ear spectacles". In order to achieve a better fit,

the ends of the arms were often fitted with a metal ring. We therefore have the 18th century to thank for our modern spectacle shape.

Until the 19th century, spectacles were only worn when the need arose. Wearing them all the time was unusual and rather frowned upon. An improvement in wearer comfort was later achieved with better bridges and more comfortable nose pads.

Thanks to ophthalmology, which became established at universities, spectacle production was also elevated to a higher scientific and technical level. The fitting of spectacles as we know it today was developed during this period. Toric lenses, which became available in 1912, enabled clear vision even with larger lens diameters. This led to a fashion trend for spectacles and pince nez with large round lenses and striking frames.

During the 20th century, a constant stream of new materials was discovered. After the Second World War, design blossomed with a previously unknown diversity of shapes. Now, spectacles had become not just a reading aid, but rather a fashionable accessory. In the 1940s, plastics conquered the frame industry and plastic lenses resulted in a significant reduction in the weight of spectacles. Thanks to the lightweight metal titanium, employed since the 1980s, spectacles weighing less than 15 grams are no longer a rarity.

Thematic area "Celebrities".

For many celebrities, spectacles are not simply a means to an end, but a trademark. Famous spectacle-wearers can be found in politics, society, the music, film and fashion industries. Among them are Sir Elton John, Buddy Holly, Ray Charles, Heino, Karl Lagerfeld, Groucho Marx, Woody Allen, the Dalai Lama and Mahatma Gandhi.

Sir Elton John.

The Doll's House Museum Basel is proud to be able to display 20 spectacles from Sir Elton John's personal property in our exhibition in Basel. The British rock star has always been legendary for his exclusive wardrobe and matching spectacles.

Sir Elton Hercules John (born Reginald Kenneth Dwight in England on 25 March 1947) is a divinely gifted singer, songwriter and pianist. In 1998, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his services to music and his charitable work.

In the course of his 40-year career, Sir Elton John has sold over 250 million discs, making him one of the most successful artists of all time. His song "Candle in the Wind" (1997) sold more than 33 million copies worldwide and remains the best-selling single to this day. Sir Elton John has had over 50 top-40 hits and received countless awards, including 6 Grammys.

The exact number of spectacles worn by Sir Elton John in the course of his career is unknown. In an interview in 2002, he claimed to own over 2000 pairs. In a subsequent radio interview, the number increased to 20,000 pairs, which means that the rock star probably owns the world's largest private spectacle collection, including some incredibly outrageous creations.

Marilyn Monroe.
We have been able to obtain sunglasses and reading glasses – including their original cases – belonging to the legendary Marilyn Monroe for the exhibition in Basel. The items are on loan from the Stampfer private collection. The sunglasses in particular appear to have been worn by the legendary film star over the course of many years. Photographs from the time of her marriage to Arthur Miller from 1956 until 1960 frequently show Marilyn Monroe wearing this model.

Marilyn Monroe, born Norma Jean Baker in Los Angeles on 1 June 1926, ranks among the film icons and sex symbols of the 20th century to this day. She was an actress, singer and film producer. Her performances in "Gentlemen prefer blondes", "How to marry a millionaire" and of course "Some like it hot" from the year 1959 are unforgettable.

Marilyn Monroe died in Los Angeles in 1962, aged just 36.

Fred Spillmann (1915–1986).
Fred Spillmann was a renowned Basel couturier, a great eccentric and a popular enfant terrible. He created a stir with his dress and way of life. His spectacles, too, were always eye-catchers.

Famous personalities from all over the world would visit his salons in the house on the Rheinsprung for a new wardrobe. His cocktail parties and vernissages before the official fashion shows were social happenings, a meeting point for

"tout Bâle". Fred Spillmann died in 1986 aged 71, shortly before his 100th fashion show.

In the exhibition we are displaying 31 spectacles worn by Fred Spillmann. They are on loan from the Spillmann family and the Ramstein Collection, Basel.

Fred Spillmann owned hundreds of spectacles and loved to have a single model of spectacles in a host of different colours. As a result, he would have up to 30 spectacles of the same type. Displayed in the exhibition are two models with frames designed by Fred Spillmann himself. Based on the sketches, the spectacles were made exclusively for him in every available colour.

Simon Ammann.
Simon Ammann, the most successful Swiss ski-jumper, is also renowned for his spectacles. It is not surprising that the sports press christened him the "Flying Harry Potter" after he won two Olympic gold medals in Salt Lake City. For the exhibition, Simon Ammann has loaned the spectacles he wore for the press conference at his reception in Zurich Airport after the double Olympic triumph in Vancouver in 2010.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860).
Arthur Schopenhauer's spectacles have been kindly loaned for the exhibition by the Swiss Opticians' Association. The German philosopher was born in Danzig on 22 February 1788. Initially, he studied medicine, switching later to philosophy.

Arthur Schopenhauer was the first European thinker to begin to understand Indian philosophy. His most important work appeared in 1819: "Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung" [The World As Will and Representation].

Thematic area "Vision aids and history".

University professor Dr. med. H. Aichmair.
The items from Prof. Dr. med. H. Aichmair's private collection deal with eyes and vision aids in the broadest sense. Visitors will gain an insight into art, music and the skill of the ophthalmologist, as well as into folklore and ethnology: from eye

idols from Syria (3000 BC) to the first depictions of someone wearing rivet spectacles (1547) to the carving from Vienna (around 1900).

Prof. Dr. med. Hermann Aichmair was born in Ansfelden (Austria) on 21 January 1924. He studied medicine and then became a specialist in ophthalmology. In 1983, he was appointed Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of Vienna.

His love both of his profession and of art aroused his passion for collecting. Over a 50-year period, he accumulated thousands of items from the entire world. The special exhibition shows a cross-section of this extraordinary collection.

Central Association of Ophthalmic Opticians, Dusseldorf
The exhibition features a complete collection on the theme of historic spectacles and workshop history, the property of the Central Association of Ophthalmic Opticians, Dusseldorf. It includes examples of spectacles spanning two centuries, from 1800 to 2000, with pince nez of various types and other fashion trends.

Thematic area "Design and designers".

"Design and designers" shows samples from two of the most renowned spectacle brands. Their innovative constructions and extravagant designs constantly attract the attention of professional circles and provide a distinctive look for stars and crowned heads.

Alain Mikli SA.
Alain Mikli has been designing eyewear for 30 years. Some of his models have become valuable symbols, others have acquired cult status. For the French optician and eyewear designer, extravagance lies in simplicity. As an individualist with vision, Alain Mikli has built up a global brand with great passion over a number of decades. Many of his spectacle and sunglass designs are now classics.

In 1978, French optician Alain Miklitarian founded Alain Mikli S.A. with its headquarters in Paris. The spectacle collection from the house of Mikli is among the luxury products in the optical industry and is regarded as provocative and trend-setting. The company employs a workforce of around 300 worldwide.

Mikli sees a fundamental difference between spectacles and sunglasses: spectacles are vision aids to be worn over many hours in combination with widely

differing outfits. Besides, they are always a reflection of character and emphasise their wearer's personality. Sunglasses, on the other hand, are primarily a fashion accessory. Naturally, they perform an optical function as well, but first and foremost they are about style.

Many celebrities wear spectacles by Alain Mikli: Brad Pitt, Catherine Deneuve and Meryl Streep, Bono, Elton John, Lenny Kravitz and Andy Warhol. Spectacles by Alain Mikli also play a role in various films, such as by Wim Wenders (1991) and «101 Dalmatians» (1996).

The models on show in the Doll's House Museum provide an insight into Alain Mikli's creative work.

ic! berlin brillen gmbh.
ic! berlin was officially founded on 1 February 1999, but spectacles with the renowned spring-hinge connector system had been available before this date. The first series dates back to as long ago as 1996.

In 1997, ic! berlin made its trade fair debut in Cologne. All of a sudden, the famous spectacle designers Alain Mikli, Robert La Roche and Lindberg appeared on the modest stand, offering their congratulations on the unusual spectacles. The first orders from the USA, Japan and Europe filled the order books and the trade press published pictures of the products. A dream became reality.

In October 1998, ic! berlin was inducted into the circle of designer spectacle companies in Paris. The company grew steadily. The first employees were engaged and spectacle production grew slowly yet steadily.

ic! berlin's philosophy is to seek out new ideas, to develop them and bring them to the market. The screwless glasses made by ic! berlin from sheet-metal were the first step and are currently the mainstay of the company. An unconventional idea of a conventional object became a daily companion. Among the outstanding characteristics of glasses from ic! berlin are the patented screwless spring-hinge connector system, the maximum wearer comfort thanks to the use of feather-light, highly flexible spring steel and the design. Hugh Grant, Samuel L. Jackson, Dennis Hopper, Madonna, Prince Albert of Monaco and many other celebrities wear spectacles from ic! berlin.

Thematic area “Eyewear and art”.

The free interpretation of everyday things is frequently the subject of artistic creativity. With examples from the collection of Claude Bader, works by Ryo Yamashita and the creations of Mercura NYC, “Eyewear and art” provides an insight into the many facets of imagination.

Brillenoptik Bader.

Brillenoptik Bader is regarded as an out-of-the-ordinary optician’s for individual spectacles. Claude Bader, born in Basel in 1951, began his apprenticeship with Optiker Keller in Basel in 1968 and devoted himself to the “wondrous” laws and properties of optics from the very beginning. From 1976 until 1978, Claude Bader worked at Optiker Noll, where he came to know the couturier Fred Spillmann, whose spectacles are also to be seen in the exhibition. In 1989, he founded his own optician’s shop in the centre of Basel in order to be able to provide a more personal service to spectacle-wearers. This is something to which Claude Bader attaches great importance. When advising customers, he represents his own philosophy. Visitors to his shop at Klosterberg 8 in Basel will not find the usual walls covered with spectacle frames. Instead, Claude Bader shows his customers individual frames to suit their personality. Claude Bader’s customers need to allow ample time; in return, they will be leaving the shop with a miniature work of art.

In Claude Bader’s shop, one also discovers spectacles as objets d’art. Claude Bader discovered an interest in art at a very early age. At the age of 14, against the wishes of his father, he used his pocket money to purchase a work by a painter, one which he still possesses to this day. Claude Bader’s interest in the link between spectacles and art arose when collecting stamps designed by artists. His interest consisted in getting the stamps signed by the respective artists. He wrote to them repeatedly, from which many acquaintances were formed. Later, Claude Bader organised exhibitions in his premises at Klosterberg 15.

For Claude Bader, art is the human striving for beauty. It led him to the desire to develop an artist’s pair of spectacles in a limited edition. There are many designer spectacles, yet hardly any artist’s spectacles. He began to grapple with the idea that only artists are able to create new dimensions in spectacle design. He took this idea to a number of artists. The first to embrace the idea was the Swiss painter and sculptor Celestino Piatti and together they set about the design

of "owl spectacles" that were finally completed as a wearable work of art. However, the aim was not simply to create artist's spectacles that would disappear into the glasses case, but spectacles that could be displayed as a work of art when not being used. The "Optolitho" idea was born. After more than a year spent making improvements and carrying out changes, the final work of art was ready for production. The owl had become the actual wearer of the spectacles. Visitors to the exhibition in the Doll's House Museum are given the opportunity to study the unique "owl spectacles" in depth. Other projects followed, among them one with the Basel artist Thomas Blank that can also be seen in the special exhibition. Inspired by so much art, there were also "art spectacles" from Claude Bader's clientele that came into being over the years.

Ryo Yamashita.

Ryo Yamashita was born in Tokyo. He is a spectacle artist and supervisor of Yamashita Glasses Studio, as well as an academic member of the Japan Society of KANSEI Engineering (JSKE). He graduated from Meiji University in literature and Japanese history. During his studies, he dedicated himself to the history of costumes and accessories from ancient times to the present day. His particular interest was reserved for spectacles. This led him to train as a master craftsman in a renowned spectacle studio.

In 1998, Ryo Yamashita opened his first studio in Setagaya, a district of Tokyo, and founded the first haute-couture system for spectacles. All components are made by hand by Ryo Yamashita himself. Between the first drawing and the finished product lie several months of hard work. His spectacle creations are veritable works of art and are increasingly gaining great attention and acclaim both in Japan and abroad. Among his clients is Archduchess Francesca von Habsburg, the Chairwoman of the Thysse-Bornemisza Art Contemporary.

Ryo Yamashita personally carries out every workstep from the design to the casting mould and the casting, including the finishing of the metal. During this work phase lasting several months, a close relationship is established between himself and the subsequent wearer of his objects. This constitutes a culture that no longer has a place in today's industrial spectacle manufacture and inspired the unique spectacle artist to investigate this individual method of spectacle-making during the Edo period (1603−1867).
The Doll's House Museum Basel is delighted to be able to display 26 works by the renowned Japanese artist Ryo Yamashita.

Mercura NYC.
The eyewear art by the sisters Rachel Cohen-Lunning and Merrilee Lichtenstein Cohen is futuristic and visionary. It is offered under the "Mercura NYC" label and intended for people who are unafraid to stand out from the crowd. Among the wearers of Mercura NYC are artists, writers, filmmakers and celebrities such as Lady Gaga, Sir Elton John, David Bowie, Barbra Streisand, Drew Barrymore and Goldie Hawn, to name but a few of a long list.

Mercura NYC's eyewear art is generally made of silver, copper, gold, enamel or crystals and usually consists of one-offs. The sisters' works are displayed and offered in galleries and museum shops. Designers such as Oscar de la Renta and Vivienne Westwood and fashion magazines such as Vogue, Elle and Cosmo happily adorn themselves with the sensational works.

Rachel and Merrilee grew up on the West Coast of the USA. They studied, among other places, at the Fashion Institute of Technology for fashion and theatrical design in New York, at the University of British Columbia School of Architecture and at the Bezaelal Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, and graduated from the Art Students League of New York before striking out with their own label. The success story began in the mid-1970s in the Hotel Chelsea in New York with fantasy jewellery, head ornaments, metal dresses and bustiers as well as incomparable spectacles.

Rachel Cohen-Lunning and Merrilee Lichtenstein Cohen have kindly loaned the Doll's House Museum some of their wonderful works of eyewear art for this exhibition.

Thematic area "The future".
Each year, the Swiss Opticians' Association (SOV), in conjunction with the trade magazine "Schweizer Optiker", runs a competition for up-and-coming ophthalmic opticians. It calls for creative spectacle design and craftsmanship and has resulted in twenty fascinating spectacle frames in the shape of dragons, gondolas and swans, to mention but a few, all of which can be seen in the exhibition.

Swiss Opticians' Association (SOV)
The role of the Swiss Opticians' Association (SOV) is to provide apprentices with a good, systematic introduction to practical work. The intercompany courses lay

the foundation for the basic vocational training in ophthalmic optics together with the training at the employer's and the lessons at the vocational college.

The future professionals are being acquainted with the finer points of the subject in the course centre for ophthalmic optics in Starrkirch, in close collaboration with employers and the vocational college.

Accompanying programme.

Free spectacle workshop for children aged 6 and above.
At the beginning of the course, each child receives a spectacle frame. Under expert supervision, the children use their imagination to decorate their spectacles to their personal taste with sequins, feathers, flowers and beads. The children can take their works of art home with them in a pretty case as a souvenir.

The workshops are free of charge and take place every Saturday and Sunday from 13.30 to 17.30. A little patience may be called for, depending on the number of participants.

Every Saturday and Sunday, 15.+16.10.2011, 22.+23.10.2011, 12.+13.11.2011, 26.+27.11.2011, 10.+11.12.2011, 17.+18.12.2011, 7.+8.1.2012, 21.+22.1.2012, 4.+5.2.2012, 18.+19.2.2012, 10.+11.3.2012, 24.+25.3.2012, 7.+8.4.2012

Spectacle competition for young and old.
A competition will be held from 15 October to 20 December 2011. We are looking for the most amusing, craziest or coolest spectacles.

Entrants will be given a spectacle frame at the Doll's House Museum reception. It can be decorated, worked on, added to, shaped and transformed in line with their own ideas and imagination. The entries will be judged by museum visitors.

Virtual spectacles sampling.
The Doll's House Museum makes it possible to pick out the perfect spectacles from countless models. An iPad is used to photograph the face, select a pair of

spectacles and fit them. The finished picture can be sent to a private e-mail address where it can be printed out.

Acknowledgements.

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- The Spillmann family, Basel
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Facts & figures.

Opening hours.
Museum, shop and café: daily from 10.00–18.00

Admission.
CHF 7.00 / 5.00
Children up to 16 years of age are admitted free of charge and only in the company of adults.

No additional charge for the special exhibition.
The entire building is wheelchair-accessible.

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