

Swiss Mountain Playgrounds

By Roland Faesser

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Your Excellencies, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to present to you a project which is unique in its scope at the present time.

On the basis of my previous work I was asked some months ago by the Swiss Embassy here in London if I would like to design a children's playground, or perhaps several, for the United Kingdom in the "International Year of Mountains". Although I come from Switzerland, I must confess that my only connection with mountains is through snowboarding down them and - I don't have any children!

So I happily agreed! Not so much to make up for these shortcomings, you understand? but because it has often been said, particularly about my narrative sculptures – that I have never outgrown the nursery, which, of course, I find rather flattering! So, I feel certain I am equal to the task!

I find that generally children's playgrounds have a rather jaded air about them. There we so often find a predictable array of standard equipment – slides, swings, see-saws, producing a short-lived effect of energy for the young participants. These rather traditional forms in standard playgrounds do have a function and a place.

However I would suggest they give very little scope to inspire creativity in the more artistic and imaginative child. So, how do we approach the question of stimulating children's different qualities and abilities in their playgrounds to encourage creativity and imagination? I have tried to create certain icons which children might identify with and relate to. A land of creature inhabitants where imaginative storytelling, games and fantastic tales can be constantly re-invented, a world where they can immerse themselves through their own creativity and imagination.

A child needs free space where it can experience adventures and experiment through role playing with brothers and sisters. Landscapes, mountains and magical inhabitants symbolise an "ideal" in contrast with adult sophisticated lifestyles.

Mountains, the largest monuments of the natural world have a strong appeal to all people, not only city dwellers. Children I know are fascinated and strongly attracted to legendary symbols like mountains and mythical animals, particularly when they are similar to many of their familiar comic-strip characters.

My "Mountain Playground" animals have supernatural qualities. They can support huge masses of rocks, grow out of mountains, transform themselves into stone. Here we have mythical creatures which exist not only as images in fairy tales but can also be experienced face to face.

I am not sure where all this leaves the swings and roundabouts and our latest high tech toys and video games which become just a passing phase for so many children.

And so I invite you all to see some of my designs on screen.

I am very happy to discuss with you and answering any questions you may have about this project.

Thank you

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