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Press Release

April 2, 1997

The Swiss Institute  New York

Disaster and Recovery **Artists Interpret the Work of the International Committee of the Red Cross**

Artists: Stefan Banz
Daniele Buetti
Claudia Di Gallo
Christoph Draeger
Josef Felix Müller
Ugo Rondinone
Nando Snozzi
Susann Walder
Pascale Wiedemann
and ICRC Founder Henry Dunant (1828-1910)

Curators: Walter Leimgruber and Rudolf Trefzer

Dates: April 17 - May 17, 1997

Opening: Thursday, April 17, 6-8 PM; Remarks at 7 PM
Artists' Talk: "Art and War" Saturday, April 19, 3 PM
Panel Discussion: "New Conflicts and Humanitarian Action" Tuesday, April 29, 6 PM
with Peter Küng (ICRC) & Sören Jessen-Petersen (UNHCR),
moderated by Deborah Amos (ABC News)

Gallery hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 11 AM - 6 PM

For information or to set up an appointment with the artists call Carin Kuoni at (212) 925-2035.

The emblem of the Red Cross is part of the landscape of war, conflict or catastrophe. Few people know the organization behind it.

The Swiss Institute is proud to present "Disaster and Recovery," an unusual two-part exhibition on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In the library, a documentary section on the ICRC will feature videos, CD-ROMs, photographs and manuscripts. In the gallery, nine contemporary artists have been invited to address themes related to the ICRC. The *pièces de résistance* of the exhibition are two large apocalyptic paintings by ICRC founder Henry Dunant (1828-1910), an activist and dreamer who, for financial reasons, fell from grace with the ICRC shortly after having founded it. These two works have never before been exhibited in the United States.

Henry Dunant

"Heaps of corpses pile up on the hills and in the hollows. It is a skirmish of man against man, a terrible, abominable struggle. Austrian and allied soldiers trample each other underfoot, strike each other down with their rifle butts, smash in their enemy's head, slice open stomachs with sabers or bayonets. They give no quarter. It's a free-for-all slaughter, a fight among wild, rabid, bloodthirsty animals. Even the wounded continue fighting to the end. Those without weapons grab the enemy with their hands and tear his throat out with their teeth.

"The horsemen are followed at full tilt by horse-drawn artillery that makes its way over the dead and wounded lying on the ground. Brains spurt out of heads that have been smashed in, limbs are broken and crushed, bodies transformed into shapeless clumps of flesh. The earth is literally soaked with blood. And the plain is sodden with the unrecognizable remains of human beings."

— Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino*, 1862

These lines were penned by a young merchant from Geneva, Henry Dunant (1828-1910), who in 1859 became an accidental witness to the bloody battle of Solferino. The fighting between the Austrian army and the allied troops of France and Sardinia-Piedmont left forty thousand people dead within a few hours. Dunant recorded these scenes of horror in his 1862 publication, *A Memory of Solferino*. The book proved a sensation and, in February 1863, gave the impetus to the establishment of the "International Committee for the Relief of the Wounded," which later became the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Dunant, who came from a pious, aristocratic Calvinist family of Geneva, fought tirelessly to realize his vision of a more humane society. In 1852, he founded the Geneva Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA); in 1855, the YMCA World Alliance; with various Jewish associations he backed the idea of an independent Jewish state in Palestine. His organization the Green Cross fought to improve the lives of women. Dunant also founded a "World Alliance for Order and Education," fostering the advancement of social and political peace; he developed the idea of a World Court; he launched appeals calling for world peace, and initiated the publication of a World Library. He fought against slavery and vivisection, and supported Esperanto.

The tireless activist, gadfly and dreamer shared the fate of other visionaries. In 1867, his business bankrupt and deeply in debt, he was forced to leave his hometown of Geneva. He drifted about Europe for twenty years. Though shunned by representatives of the ICRC, he nevertheless received the first Nobel Peace Prize, in 1901. But that did not rescue him from obscurity. In 1910, impoverished and alone, Dunant died in a hospital in the small Swiss parish of Heiden.

Around 1890, Dunant committed to paper four color pencil drawings, his prophetic-apocalyptic view of history, presenting the intellectual and spiritual map of his thoughts and actions.

The International Committee of the Red Cross

The ICRC is connected to Switzerland in many and various ways. Founded by Swiss, its headquarters are located in Geneva. Its Assembly—the supreme policy-making body—is comprised solely of Swiss citizens. But the ICRC is neither an agency of Switzerland nor a subsidiary organization of the United Nations. It is a strictly neutral, independent humanitarian institution.

Through a series of specific activities the ICRC attempts to offer protection and aid to military and civilian victims of armed conflicts and internal unrest:

- It serves as a neutral mediator between warring parties.
- It supervises the application of international humanitarian law, endeavors to develop it further, and sees to its dissemination among governments, armies, and other groups.
- It visits those incarcerated in prisons and camps.
- It offers humanitarian and medical aid.
- It cares for refugees and expellees.
- It carries out preventive measures (agricultural programs, vaccination campaigns, public health programs).
- It offers programs for amputees and the war-disabled.
- Its Central Tracing Agency searches for missing persons and organizes family reunions.

Today the ICRC has some 1,500 staff in the field and at headquarters and over 6,000 locally hired staff working in more than 50 countries. In 1996, they visited over 130,000 detainees, reunited some 10,500 families, forwarded almost 2,000,000 Red Cross messages, distributed over 80,000 tons of relief supplies, carried out some 22,000 surgical operations, and fitted over 6,500 amputees with artificial limbs.

In its work the ICRC upholds a principle of discretion. As a rule, violations against international law are not publicly denounced; rather, the ICRC attempts to halt them through concerted behind-the-scenes interventions. This principle has been criticized repeatedly in recent years, particularly as a result of the role of the ICRC during the Second World War. The documentary exhibition part in the library will address this as well as other issues relating to the origin and history of the ICRC.

The Contemporary Artists

A number of Swiss artists have been invited to address themes related to the ICRC. The works they created show just how multifaceted the issues are a humanitarian organization such as the International Committee of the Red Cross is confronted with: war and hardship, suffering and hope, pain and joy, life and death—the entire range of human existence.

Being Swiss, these artists are accustomed to having their country stereotyped as a paradise unfamiliar with ill fortune. War is something that is merely rehearsed, in

strictly planned and oft-tested practice runs. The thin line between normal existence and catastrophe, between active participation and standing on the sidelines, between engagement and neutrality, between humanity and inhumanity, concerns these artists as much as it does the International Committee of the Red Cross. This balancing act is a frequent Swiss theme but one that has implications for the international community.

The ICRC has as its reason for being human suffering and the human triumph over suffering. Few of the artists in this exhibition take on the ICRC itself but they all deal with the issues it deals with. The works in the exhibition represent a range of artistic styles and approaches. The artists come from different backgrounds, the German, Italian and French speaking parts of Switzerland, and from different generations. They are Stefan Banz, Daniele Buetti, Claudia Di Gallo, Christoph Draeger, Josef Felix Müller, Ugo Rondinone, Nando Snozzi, Susann Walder, and Pascale Wiedemann.



Curators

Walter Leimgruber is a historian whose Ph.D. treated American foreign policy under President John F. Kennedy. He has worked as a curator on both the history and contemporary of Switzerland. He is an assistant professor at the University of Zurich.

Rudolf Trefzer is a historian. For his Ph.D., he investigated education and pedagogics during the Enlightenment. He writes frequently on topics of everyday life and culture. From 1993 to 1995, he worked as a Delegate of the ICRC in Ethiopia and Nigeria.



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**For further information, or to set up an interview with the artists
or the curators, please call Carin Kuoni at (212) 925-2035.**

Simultaneously, at Lombard Freid on 470 Broome Street, “My Swiss Friends” will take place. The exhibition by Via Lewandowsky includes several of the artists participating in “Disaster and Recovery.”

Addendum to Press Release

**Disaster and Recovery:
Artists Interpret the Work
of the International Committee
of the Red Cross (ICRC)**
April 17 to May 17, 1997



The Contemporary Artists

Stefan Banz uses blood collected in testtubes and juxtaposed with the precise depictions of thirty different commercial rifle brands. The romantic aura of these weapons, conveyed through their brand names—"Diana," "Weihrach" ("myrrh"), "Krieghoff" ("house of war") and "Imperator"—clashes with their horrific potential.

Banz, who was born in 1961, has a Masters Degree in Art History from the University of Zurich. He was the co-founder and director of the Kunsthalle Lucerne and has had one person exhibitions at the Centre PasquART, Biel (Switzerland); Espai Lucas, Valencia (Spain); and at the Kunstmuseum, Lucerne. In 1993, he showed at Kubinski Gallery in New York.

Daniele Buetti's string with drawings of flags, like a clothline, cuts across the gallery. The flags are however drained of their color. Nationalism deflated, they hang idly and meaninglessly in the gallery space and drift with the currents of the air.

Buetti is a sculptor (born 1956) whose performances have taken him to marketplaces in Germany's medieval cities (for *A Man Is His Job*) and to the Paris subway stations. He studied at the School for Visual Arts, Zurich, and the Academy of Fine Arts, Berlin. In 1994, he was awarded the New York Studio of the City of Zurich. His work has been seen at the Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne; Kleines Helmhaus, Zurich; and Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin.

Claudia Di Gallo's "Travelling Souls" is an empty stretcher that comes in its own wrapping case. Lying low on the ground, it is ready to be used, a silent vehicle to the grave or to recovery.

Di Gallo (born in 1959) has exhibited at CAN Centre d'Art, Neuchâtel (Switzerland); the Kunsthalle St. Gallen; the Kunsthau Glarus (Switzerland); the Kunstmuseum, Lucerne; Witte de With, Rotterdam; and, in 1995, at the Swiss Institute in "Take Care."

Christoph Draeger studies and then recreates in his studio natural or manmade disasters. What looks like the result of utter destruction has carefully been composed by the artist. This holds true for his large wall photograph as well as for his "Shack," which poses as an emergency shelter constructed of driftwood and other debris.

Draeger (born in 1965) currently has Switzerland's PS 1 studio. He studied at the Schools for Visual Arts in Lucerne and Brussels, and has exhibited at the Kunsthalle Bern; mamco, Geneva; Filiale Basel; Kunstmuseum, Lucerne (with ©USA-United Swiss Artists); and the National Gallery, Berlin.

Josef Felix Müller's "Two Sides. Sculpture for the ICRC" is an expressionistic, life-size wooden piece that reveals several figures as one circles around its abstract exterior. The sculpture evokes the exchange of a bargaining table, where every issue of course has two sides—with people at its heart.

Müller (born in 1955) is the former director of the Kunsthalle St. Gallen. He is the recipient of a DAAD scholarship. He has had one person exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Giessen (Germany); the Kunstverein Ingolstadt (Germany); the Kunstverein Göttingen (Germany); Produzentengalerie, Hamburg; Kunstmuseum St. Gallen; and the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel.

Ugo Rondinone's environment with lightbulbs and daisy-like chains—made of cigarette butts, however—is full of the nostalgia that any kind of displacement brings. At once fragile and indestructible, the construction shuns the natural world in favor of contrasting but linked materials.

Born in 1963, Rondinone has had one person exhibitions at Le Consortium, Dijon; Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva; Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich; ARC, Paris; Galerie Walcheturm, Zurich; and Kunstmuseum, Lucerne. In 1996, he represented Switzerland at the São Paulo Biennale. He currently has the New York Studio of the City of Zurich.

Nando Snozzi has, for the past few weeks, faxed images of faces to the Swiss Institute. In the exhibition, these fragments will again become one through the intervention of the artist: ghosts that are "resurrected" and in their resurrection speak of what was lost.

Born in 1951, Snozzi studied at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts, Milano, and the University of Paris VIII. He has had exhibitions at Portico 3, Locarno (Switzerland); Galerie Stummer, Zurich; the Swiss National Museum, Zurich; and Museo Cantonale, Lugano (Switzerland).

Susann Walder's scattered pieces suggest loss and the extreme urge to hold on to the material objects that in some ways constitute our worlds and lives: the pieces, the detritus of lives, are what inevitably results from a catastrophe, whether a war or natural disaster.

Born in 1959, Walder studied at the School for Visual Arts, Basel, and the Academy of Fine Arts, Cologne. Her work has been seen at the Galerie Art-Magazin, Zurich; Kleines Helmhaus, Zurich; Witte de With, Rotterdam; Galerie Walcheturm, Zurich; Steirischer Herbst, Graz (Austria); and Helmhaus, Zurich.

Pascale Wiedemann recreates a mine field in the exhibition. However, in her installation what is dangerous is visible, even though not necessarily evident: on a blanket of wool sit thirty objects made of resin that are both abstract and figurative. Beautiful and threatening, it is a blanket weighed down by death.

Wiedemann (born in 1966) trained as interior decorator before entering the School for Visual Arts, Zurich, and the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. In 1994, she was awarded the Swiss Studio at the Cité des Arts, Paris. She has had one person exhibitions at Centre PasquART, Biel (Switzerland); Espai Lucas, Valencia (Spain); Galerie Eboran, Salzburg (Austria); and Galerie A. Walter, Freiburg i.B. (Germany).

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