

DISASTER AND RECOVERY

ARTISTS INTERPRET THE WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC)

The Swiss Institute, New York
April 17 to May 17, 1997

Hardly anyone in the world is not familiar with the emblem of the Red Cross. It appears as almost part of the landscape of war, conflict or catastrophe. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is often the only humanitarian organization capable of offering help to civilian and military casualties of war and other conflicts, and of providing any semblance of protection. But what exactly is the ICRC? Is it an international agency, is it part of the United Nations? How do the national Red Cross societies fit in? And what does all of this have to do with Switzerland?

A number of Swiss artists were invited to address the ICRC as the subject of their art. Their works show just how multifaceted the issues are a humanitarian organization such as the ICRC must face: war and hardship, suffering and hope, pain and joy, life and death—the entire range of human existence.

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 ICRC. This balancing act is a frequent Swiss theme but one that has implications for the international community.

Henry Dunant, Visionary

Heaps of corpses are piling 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.

A similar battle occurs nearby, made even more terrible by the appearance of a cavalry squadron attacking at full gallop. Horses' hooves crush the dead and wounded. One of the injured has his jawbone torn off, another has his head shattered. The whinnying of the horses is mixed with curses, screams, and cries of pain and confusion.

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.

These lines are not taken from the script of a horror film. They were penned by a young merchant from Geneva, Henry Dunant (1828–1910), who while visiting Lombardy 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 thousands dead and wounded within a few hours. Deeply shaken by the extent of the human suffering he had witnessed, Dunant, along with the local population, tried to assist the injured and dying, who had been abandoned and left defenseless by their own armies.

These scenes of horror became the turn-

ing point in Dunant's life, and he recorded them in his 1862 publication, *A Memory of Solferino*. The book proved a sensation and gave the impetus to the establishment of 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 humanitarian 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.

Around 1890, Dunant committed to paper four color pencil drawings on the topic of the Bible and salvation, entitled "A Symbolic, Chronological Outline of Several Prophecies of the Holy Scriptures by a Swiss Christian," which presented the intellectual



and spiritual map of his thoughts and actions. He saw himself as an instrument of redemption in the battle for "increased humanity in an inhuman time."

Dunant, 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 town of Heiden.

Many of Henry Dunant's projects became reality, and practically all of his ideas exist today in the form of a corresponding organization.

The International Committee of the Red Cross: A Vision Asserts Itself

In his book, *A Memory of Solferino*, Henry Dunant asks whether, "from the dual standpoint of humanity and Christianity," it was not imperative to create in the individual countries permanent relief organizations for the rescue and care of wounded soldiers, and to formulate "international, legally binding, and holy principles which, once accepted and ratified, could serve as a basis for the relief societies."

The Geneva Public Welfare Society welcomed the idea with enthusiasm. Among the Society numbered the rich and powerful of the city, men of action to whom achievement and a sense of reality counted greatly. A commission was formed with Dunant serving as secretary, and it resolved to invite to Geneva an international conference and to propose to it a draft agreement.

On August 22, 1864, twelve countries signed the basic Geneva Convention. It decreed that ambulances, field hospitals, and medical personnel be "recognized as neutral, and accordingly protected and respected by the belligerent parties," and that "wounded or sick military personnel . . . without regard to nationality" should be "taken in and cared for." A red cross on a white background was chosen as the symbol of protection—a reversal of the colors of the Swiss flag.

The odd symbiosis of visionary and pragmatists turned out successfully. Many countries established national organizations. The Committee in Geneva assumed the responsibility of coordinating them. In 1919, these national societies created the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The ICRC, the national societies, and the Federation together represent the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, active today in roughly 150 countries.

An International and Swiss Organization

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, as many believe. It is a strictly neutral, independent humanitarian institution.

With the first convention in 1864, the ICRC established the main body of international humanitarian law, which it has continued to develop. At its core today are the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols of 1977. In contrast to other non-governmental relief organizations (NGOs), the ICRC is based on a mandate that is anchored in international law.

Through a series of specific activities the ICRC attempts to offer protection and assistance 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.

Vision on the Test Block of Reality

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.

Even today the ICRC continues to hold to its principle of discretion, as experience has shown that in most cases low-key pressure

can achieve more for victims than widespread publicity. However, in serious cases in which this approach does not yield any results, the ICRC no longer hesitates to inform the public of abuses and rights violations.

For several years, the ICRC and other relief organizations have been confronted with the dissolution of the bipolar Cold War world, in which the "classic" war situation has become an exception. Often it is not regular armies that confront each other, but organizations and groups acting as gangs, which are not bound by any rules at all. In such instances, intervention on behalf of the victims of violence can also endanger the lives of the members of the relief organization. And it is mainly in such "unstructured" confrontations that combatants tend to choose "cheap" weapons. Among the cheapest of weapons are land mines. They are of little use militarily, but a great threat to civilians and children. Following the resolution of a conflict they prove to be an enormous economic liability, as they are extremely expensive to dispose of and render huge areas of land unusable for long periods of time. For this reason the ICRC, together with the United Nations, has proposed a total ban on land mines.

A Constant Tightrope Walk

Only a thin line separates a carefree, unencumbered existence from that of sudden misfortune and catastrophe. This fine line serves as a basic motif for many of the art works presented in this exhibition. Being Swiss, these artists are accustomed to having their country stereotyped as a paradise unfamiliar with ill fortune. War is something that is merely practiced, in strictly planned and oft-tested scenarios and practice runs.

Catastrophe exists merely as a model, air raid shelters and faultless equipment provide protection against a hostile world. This security is deceptive. There can be no isolated utopia, even though some Swiss may imagine it to be otherwise.

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—Walter Leimgruber
and Rudolf Trefzer
exhibition curators



STEFAN BÄNZ

1961 Born in Menznau, Switzerland. Lives in Lucerne.

1982–1991 University of Zurich, Masters Degree in Art History, German Literature and Literary Criticism

1985 Founder, Galerie Prosart, Lucerne
1987/1988 Director, Space for Contemporary Swiss Art, Lucerne

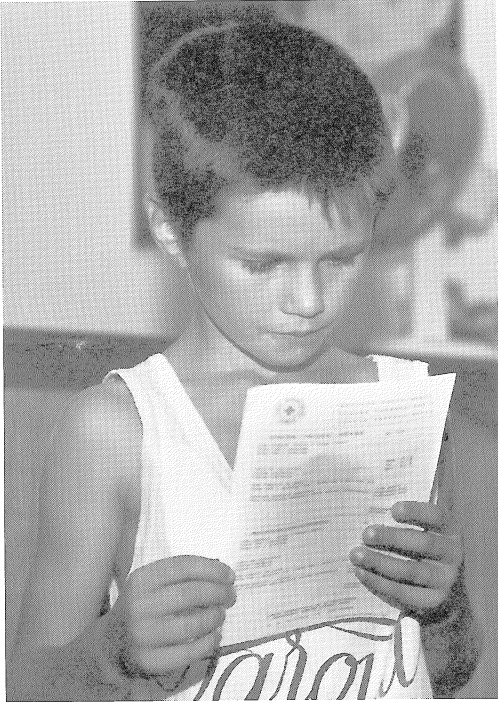
1989–1993 Co-founder and Director, Kunsthalle Luzern

SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

1997 *Demon Shelter*, Centre PasquART, Biel (Switzerland); Espai Lucas, Valencia (Spain)

1996 *Dive. Give the People What They Want*, Offenes Kulturhaus, Linz (Austria); Galerie Christine König, Vienna (with Sylvie Fleury); *You Can Spend Your Time Alone*, Ars Futura, Zurich
1995 *Give Me a Leonhard Cohen Afterworld*, Kunstmuseum, Lucerne

1994 Bloom Gallery, Amsterdam
1993 Kubinski Gallery, New York
1992 *Der Anbau des Museums*, Kunsthalle Luzern



DANIELE BUETTI

1956 Born in Fribourg, Switzerland. Lives in Zurich and Berlin.

1978–1983 School for Visual Arts, Zurich
1984–1988 Academy of Fine Arts, Berlin
1991/1992 Scholarship for the International Studio Program of Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin

1992 Grant, School for Visual Arts, Zurich
1993 Scholarship of Nordrhein-Westfalen for artist colony Schöppingen (Germany)
1994 Scholarship of the Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of Berlin

1994/1995 Awarded New York Studio of the City of Zurich

SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS AND PERFORMANCES

1997 Espai Lucas, Valencia (Spain); Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne; Centre PasquART, Biel (Switzerland); Bartok 32 Galeria, Budapest
1996 Museumsakademie, Berlin
1995 Galerie Ultimate Akademie, Cologne

1994 *A Man is His Job*, touring performance in Münster and Nordrhein-Westfalen (Germany); Kleines Helmhaus, Zurich

1993 *Sales Promotor*, performance, Zurich and Paris; *Zu etwas dienen*, performance, different subway stops, Paris

1992 Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin

CLAUDIA DI GALLO

1959 Born in Lucerne. Lives in Zurich.
1994 Scholarship, Canton of Zurich

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

1996 *Non! Pas comme ça!*, CAN Centre d'Art, Neuchâtel (Switzerland); *Lesen*, Kunsthalle St. Gallen (Switzerland); *Körper, Identität, Irritation*, Kunsthaus Glarus (Switzerland)

1995 *Take Care*, Swiss Institute, New York (cat.); *Bettenausstellung*, Hotel-Pension Nürnberger Eck, Berlin; *Private Welten*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich

1994 *Watt, Witte de With*, Center of Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; Galerie Maison des Jeunes, Neuchâtel (Switzerland) (one person exhibition)
1993 *Invisible Touch*, Galerie Martina Dettlerer, Frankfurt a.M.

1992 Kunstmuseum, Lucerne
1990 Galerie Apropos, Lucerne (one person exhibition)

CHRISTOPH DRAEGER

1965 Born in Zurich. Lives in New York.
1986–1990 School for Visual Arts, Lucerne
1990 Academy of Fine Arts, Brussels; Grant, Landis & Gyr-Kulturstiftung

1991 Grant, Canton of Grisons (also 1993 and 1995)
1994 Scholarship, Kiefer-Habitzel-Stiftung (also 1995)
1996 Awarded P.S. 1 Studio, New York

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

1997 P.S. 1 Clocktower Gallery, New York (cat.)
1996/1997 *It's the End of the World as We Love It*, Shed im Eisenwerk, Frauenfeld (Switzerland) (with Martin Frei)

1996 *Begrenzte Grenzenlosigkeit*, National Gallery, Berlin (cat.); *Young Art*, Kunsthalle Bern (cat.); mamco, Geneva (with Martin Frei); *Picture This*, Dennis Anderson Gallery, Antwerp (one person exhibition)

1995 Filiale Basel (cat.) (one person exhibition)
1994 *Photographies*, Galerie Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels; Musée d'Art moderne, Liège; *M.U.S.E.U.M.*, Kunstmuseum, Lucerne (with ©USA-United Swiss Artists) (cat.)

1993 *Critical Distance*, ADO, Antwerp (cat.) (one person exhibition)

1992 *In der Kälte*, Kunsthalle, Lucerne (cat.)
1991 Etablissement d'en Face, Brussels (cat.) (one person exhibition)

JOSEF FELIX MÜLLER

1955 Born in Eggersriet, Switzerland. Lives in St. Gallen.

1980–1982 Director, St. Galerie, St. Gallen
1985 Founder, Vexer Publishers, St. Gallen; Co-founder, Kunsthalle St. Gallen

1991 DAAD Scholarship, Berlin
1993–1995 Director, Kunsthalle St. Gallen
1996 Teaching positions at the Federal Polytechnical Institute, Zurich, and the Summer Academy, Wismar

SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

1996 Kunsthalle Giessen (Germany); Kunstverein Ingolstadt (Germany); Kunstverein Göttingen (Germany); Galerie Schwind, Frankfurt a.M. Produzentengalerie, Hamburg; Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen (Switzerland)

1992 Kunstmuseum St. Gallen
1985 Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel; Neue Galerie, Sammlung Ludwig, Aachen
1984 Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva

USO RONDINONE

1963 Born in Brunnen, Switzerland. Lives in Zurich.
1986–1990 Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna
1997/1998 Awarded New York Studio of the City of Zurich

SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

1997 Centre d'Art Contemporain, Le Consortium, Dijon; *Tender Places Come From Nothing*, Der Raum, Cato Jans, Hamburg

1996 *Hey Day*, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva (cat.); *Dogdays Are Over*, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (cat.); Le Case d'Arte, Milano; *Where Do We Go From Here*, Biennale São Paulo, São Paulo (cat.)

1995 *Migrants*, ARC Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Galerie Walcheturm, Zurich (also 1992 and 1991)

1993 Galerie Ballgasse (Pakesch & Stejskal), Vienna
1991 Galerie Pinx., Oskar Schmidt, Vienna
1990 Kunstmuseum, Lucerne (cat.)
1987 Space for Contemporary Swiss Art, Lucerne

NANDO SNOZZI

1951 Born in Bellinzona, Switzerland. Lives in Bellinzona.

1973–1977 Brera Academy of Fine Arts, Milano
1977–1980 University of Paris VIII, Faculty of Fine Arts

SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

1996 Portico 3, Locarno (Switzerland)
1995 Galleria La Cornice, Bellinzona (Switzerland)
1994 Galerie Stummer, Zurich
1993 *Serie Helvetica: Ipotesi per un delirio*, Galleria Barbagutt, Gnosca

1992 Installation, Swiss National Museum, Zurich
1991 UNIL, Unité d'art contemporain, University of Lausanne

1990 Museo Cantonale, Lugano (Switzerland)
1987 Galerie Led Line, Lucerne

SUSANN WALDER

1959 Born in Muttlenz, Switzerland. Lives in Zurich.

1980–1983 School for Visual Arts, Basel
1985/1986 Academy of Fine Arts, Cologne

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS AND PERFORMANCES

1997 Galerie Art-Magazin, Zurich (one person exhibition)

1996 Kleines Helmhaus, Zurich (one person exhibition); *Manifesta 1*, Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam
1995 *Zombie-Transit Part X*, Galerie Walcheturm, Zurich; Galerie Art6, Zurich (one person exhibition)

1994 *Bad zur Sonne*, Steirischer Herbst, Graz (Austria); *Women for Shopping*, Galerie Walcheturm, Zurich

1991 *Verwandtschaften*, Helmhaus, Zurich

1988 *Fête des morts*, Musée du Manoir, Martigny; Galerie Art-Magazin, Zurich (one person exhibition)

1987 Galerie Art-Magazin, Zurich

PASCALLE WIEDEMANN

1966 Born in Chur, Switzerland. Lives in Zurich. School for Visual Arts, Zurich. Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna.

1992 Grant, School for Visual Arts, Zurich
1994 Awarded Studio at the Cité des Arts, Paris, by the Canton of Grisons

1995 Scholarship, Canton of Grisons
1996 Grant, Canton of Zurich; First Prize, Kiefer-Habitzel-Scholarship; Grant, School for Visual Arts, Zurich

SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

1997 *Subcutan*, Centre PasquART, Biel (Switzerland)
1996 Espai Lucas, Valencia (Spain)
1995 Galerie Eboran, Salzburg (Austria)
1994 Galerie TUMB, Zurich

1993 Galerie A. Walter, Freiburg i.B. (Germany)
The artist acknowledges the help of her co-knitters, Menga Rageth and Martha Wiedemann.

CURATORS

Walter Leimgruber is a historian, whose Ph.D. treated American foreign policy under President John F. Kennedy. He has worked intensively as a curator on both the history and presence of Switzerland. Many of the widespread questions concerning Switzerland's historic and contemporary role in world affairs were brought to the surface in his seminal exhibit "Sonderfall? Die Schweiz zwischen Réduit und Europa" ("A Case Apart? Switzerland between Withdrawal and Europe"), presented at the Swiss National Museum, Zurich, in 1992. He is 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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Photo credits, top to bottom, left to right: Rwanda, 1993. *On the Road to Tumba; First World War Nurses Help the Wounded in the Trenches*, July 1, 1916, photo by Red Cross, Great Britain; Rwanda 1994. *The Nyarushishi Camp, Standing in Line*; Yugoslavia 1995. *The Central Tracing Agency's Belgrad Office*; Rwanda 1994. *At the Border to Zaire*; Cambodia 1996. *ICRC Rehabilitation Center, Battambang*, photo by Philippe Dutoit. All photographs by Thierry Gassmann except where noted otherwise. © ICRC.