

HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES HERE AND NOW






EDITORIAL

Humanitarian crises around the world make news headlines every day. The images associated to these tragedies are often related to tears, suffering, hunger, desperation, loneliness, separation, desolation, etc. Sometimes we feel helpless or overwhelmed by all these images of crises, violence, armed conflicts and natural disasters. The contemporary art installation *Humanitarian Principles. Here and Now* is a reaction to these feelings.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), in conversation with the Musée de l'Elysée in Lausanne and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), developed a concept, which allows people to take a step back and time to pause, to think and to feel. The idea is to provide a space for discussion and debate about the humanitarian sphere and how it is changing.

Instead of looking at these crises head-on, we have given a carte blanche to ten Swiss photographers to reflect on and illustrate the Humanitarian Principles that are central to humanitarian action.



Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence are indeed the compass to guide any action that intends to provide aid and relief to millions of affected people. These principles, and the values that they entail, are the foundations and objectives of humanitarian action, and what gives it its universal claim.

The result raises in-depth reflections on complex issues facing humanitarian operations through the art of photography. It draws upon the powerful and universal language of images. It aims to push the public to think carefully about this field, refusing to offer pre-packaged solutions, instead stimulating new and unexpected reflections through this change in perspective.

Humanitarian Principles. Here and Now aims to give the visitors a better understanding and deeper insight into the significance that Humanitarian Principles have in everyday life and provides a space for *Dialogue on Humanity*.

Tatyana Franck,
Director of the Musée de l'Elysée

Gilles Carbonnier,
Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Ambassador Manuel Bessler,
Delegate for Humanitarian Aid and Head SHA



THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

Development of the Fundamental Principles and the Humanitarian Principles

The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement did not come into being as abstract principles. They originate in the real actions of caring people who spontaneously came to the aid of the wounded and dying on the battlefield of Solferino in 1859. In the aftermath, efforts were made to identify general concepts and guiding principles that could serve as a basis for future humanitarian action. A first attempt to formulate them can be found in Henry Dunant's *A Memory of Solferino* as early as 1862.

The same applies to the Humanitarian Principles. They are now crucial for the UN, its agencies and all states to establish and maintain access to civilian populations affected by natural disaster, armed conflict, or other complex emergency situations to address human suffering, wherever found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings in the framework of those principles.



Humanity Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.

Impartiality Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.

Neutrality Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.





THE COMMITMENT OF A COUNTRY, A HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION AND A MUSEUM

Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs

While the Humanitarian Principles of Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality and Independence are rooted in its history, Switzerland is convinced that they are now more relevant than ever. Indeed, in an increasingly complex and polarised humanitarian environment, principled humanitarian action continues to make a difference in effectively preventing suffering as well as accessing and serving populations in need. We can and should strengthen these principles by constantly reaffirming and demonstrating their value, by fostering understanding of these fundamental principles and by supporting all actors in applying them. In this spirit, we commit to this art project to raise awareness of what it means to apply the Humanitarian Principles not only to humanitarian action, but also to our everyday lives.



**International
Committee of the
Red Cross (ICRC)**

The ICRC has committed to this project as it offers the opportunity to rethink the four Humanitarian Principles in a different way. It expands the horizon and delivers a fascinating parallelism between art and Humanitarian Principles. The message and essence of the Humanitarian Principles are common and remain undeniably universal; however, the prisms of reading are different from one individual to another. Overall, it is a very good example of how art speaks differently to people, and how it opens up dialogue where it would not have been the case in another context.

**Musée de l'Elysée,
Lausanne**

For many people in Switzerland, daily life seems far removed from applying the Humanitarian Principles. As a photography museum, we wanted to challenge that notion and recognise that these principles extend beyond the contexts of natural disaster and war in a way that transcends age, gender, culture, language, and are just as present in the minutiae of the every day. Moreover, we consider photography a powerful and relevant tool to do so, and believe that art offers visitors the opportunity to approach Humanitarian Principles afresh from new angles. As a group, these films remind us not only of the diversity of human experience and the daily presence of humanitarian acts, but also of the versatility and power of the image to convey them.



HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES. HERE AND NOW

How can art help us understand Humanitarian Principles? As part of a collaboration with Swiss Humanitarian Aid and in conversation with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Musée de l'Elysée gave a carte blanche to ten artists from French-speaking Switzerland to create a new film, sharing their vision of Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality and Independence. By means of these original shorts, the artists examine the impact of the Humanitarian Principles from a fresh, local and contemporary perspective.



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Rebecca Bowring,
The Mechanical Bride, 2018
© Rebecca Bowring

The Mechanical Bride

Mirrored images are the centrepiece of Rebecca Bowring's composition, *The Mechanical Bride*, an ode to human interaction that in her view seems to be lost in our society. "I tried to highlight two aspects that make people's relationships more difficult: the loss of eye contact as well as the presence of modern technology and social media," she says. Her biggest challenge was to create a piece around the four Humanitarian Principles and keep faithful to her work at the same time. "I focused on humanity, which came naturally to me. Reflecting neutrality in my film was close to impossible though," Rebecca remembers. "I see my work as a conversation and so far, I have never had a neutral exchange with anyone." The biggest learning curve for Rebecca was to realise the difficulties of applying the Humanitarian Principles in everyday life.

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Mark Henley,
Facing Prejudice, 2018
© Mark Henley

Facing Prejudice

When creating *Facing Prejudice* Mark Henley intended to do something different, he did not expect his project to take this turn. “I set out taking portraits of vulnerable men, who often struggle to express themselves and talk about what they’ve been through.” The temporary exhibition which followed got vandalised in the night, the faces disfigured. As a documentary photographer, Henley has always tried to remain behind the camera; however, this work gave him a new perspective. “I learnt how to deal with self-exposure, to use my own voice and accept my reaction to events as part of the story,” he observes. “In the end, the project became a story about action, reaction and following counteraction on my part, turning the final damaged photos into a metaphor for the difficulties vulnerable people face for integration.”

Selfish

With *Selfish*, Cyril Porchet wants to remind us that even though principles may have good intentions, they can also create obstacles for humans. “Principles are ambivalent and can be a real challenge, but that’s why they exist,” he says, stressing that his project mainly reflected the principle of humanity. For two-and-half minutes, we watch how koi carps fight for food, a scene that touched Cyril during his first visit to Japan: “When I saw these fish struggle to survive, I felt distressed about the inequality among them.” The film invites the viewers to think about their own lives and how inequalities affect them. It’s also a display of opposites. “Just like in my previous work, I wanted to strike a balance between the seductive power of an image and anxiety.”

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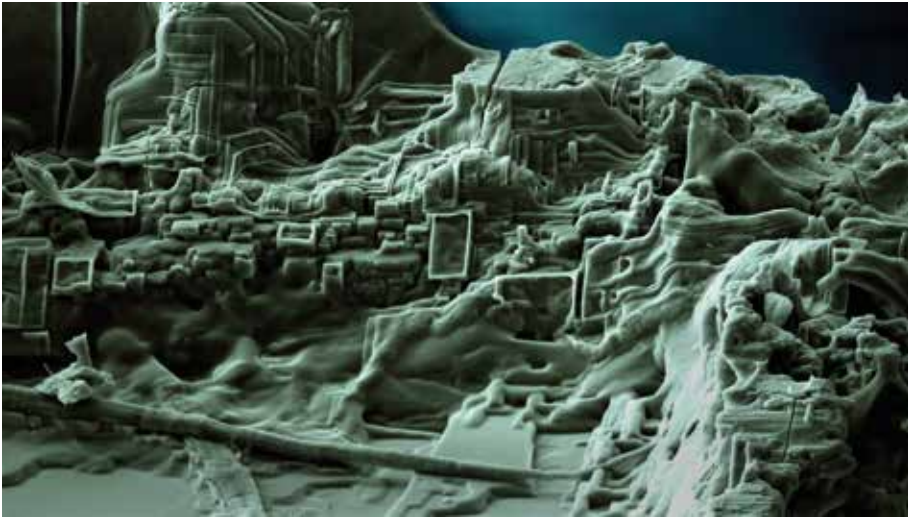
Cyril Porchet,
Selfish, 2018
© Cyril Porchet

The Salève

Before participating in this project, Laurence Rasti believed that she had to travel far away to find powerful images for her projects, which often deal with identity, human rights and migration. When she created *The Salève*, she realised that strong images and moving stories could be found right on her doorstep. “If the project had not been called ‘Here and Now’, I may not have looked closer to home,” she says. “It may be coincidence, but since my symbolic walk to the Salève with Zia, an Afghan man, I have conducted several photographic projects around Geneva.” While working on her film, she learnt that humanitarian issues did not stop at borders. “There is something absurd about the fact that all over the world people are not born with the same rights. I just don’t understand.”



Laurence Rasti,
The Salève, 2018
© Laurence Rasti



Virginie Rebetez,
Memorial Garden, 2018
© Virginie Rebetez

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Memorial Garden

When asked to take part in the project, Virginie Rebetez was excited to fulfill her dream of using her photography to showcase the humanitarian world. “It’s important that the artists engage with their work and society,” she says. When creating *Memorial Garden*, she had the four principles of independence, impartiality, neutrality and humanity in mind but focusing on humanity was first, for the living as well as for the dead. “It’s the physical body and presence a family mourns in death; funeral rituals help accept the loss and give closure.” For Virginie, neutrality is the least Humanitarian Principle compatible with arts as, in her view, it has a completely different meaning in the creative world. “Making art means you cannot be neutral, it’s the expression of an idea.”



Manon Wertenbroek,
Similar Days, 2018
© Manon Wertenbroek

Similar Days

For Manon Wertenbroek one of the biggest appeals to join this project was the freedom the artists had in their creativity. “I had never worked on a commission before, and I found it intriguing to create something following the Humanitarian Principles,” she said. Manon’s main focus lies in humanity, which in her case is how people interact with each other, how they connect or disconnect. *In Similar Days*, she portrays psychological conflicts by using blurred images which are accompanied by negative narratives. At the same time, subtitles appear that give the situation a positive spin. “I’ve applied a method called ‘cognitive reappraisal’, which is an emotion regulation strategy to cope with difficult situations.” The project was also beneficial for her personal development. “I learnt how to control my own emotions better when I face difficult situations.”

Schmolitz

Humanity is at the centre of Caroline Etter's short movie *Schmolitz*, a story about an asylum seeker and a burial officer who end up working together due to the surrounding circumstances. "When I shot the film, I tried to be neutral as an artist as well as an observer, but I still had an opinion on the matter," she says. Although there are few words spoken in the film, Caroline's message comes through strongly: humanity is at the heart of our ability to connect with others and accept their differences. The project, she explains, was an incredible professional and personal challenge involving many different people who share a similar experience. "Expressing an artistic perspective on a humanitarian issue and seeing its impact in a local and contemporary context was certainly educational."

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Caroline Etter,
Schmolitz, 2018
© Caroline Etter

The Marauders

When asked to participate in this carte blanche project, Yann Gross grabbed the opportunity to highlight a situation that tends to be forgotten in our societies. “Homelessness is a big part of our lives but compared to the refugee situation, media reports are pretty sparse,” he observes. When creating *The Marauders*, a story about a man who set up a village for the homeless to rebuild their lives, the principle of humanity was at the forefront of his work. The film stresses the importance of acknowledging our peers and observing each other to encourage introspection. “Sharing experiences and being valued by others is the essence of humanity.” Neutrality also plays a big part in the film. “The people in the village display great neutrality; everyone is welcome, no matter what their religion or the colour of their skin.”

Yann Gross,
The Marauders, 2018
© Yann Gross





Sarah Carp,
Renaissance, 2018

© Sarah Carp

Renaissance

With her impressive and moving photography, Sarah Carp reflects on her own life as a parent and the challenge she was facing at the time. “I chose a personal story because as a single mother with a newborn baby I needed help. It was a rather fragile period in my life,” she says. This is probably the reason why the principles of humanity and independence have had the biggest influence on *Renaissance*. Neutrality, she thinks, does not really go with art. “As soon you decide to present something in a context, you lose neutrality. As my project represents my life, I wanted to be sensitive and find the right distance to suggest tension, but not illustrate anything directly.” The project helped Sarah understand the personal meaning of the Humanitarian Principles and how to follow them.



Mathieu Bernard-Reymond,
***We Understand Nothing*, 2018**
© Mathieu Bernard-Reymond

We Understand Nothing

Mathieu Bernard-Reymond was inspired by the project and the challenge to try out something new. In *We Understand Nothing* he depicts the importance of being good to others in order to feel human. “The movie suggests that our need for humanity is very closely connected to our individual needs for redemption and the fight against time and death,” he says. By seamlessly superimposing black and white images, Mathieu illustrates how humans are continuously confronted with paradoxes when they think on a wider scale. This project inspired him to venture out and go one step further. It was the first time he attempted animated work, composed an original soundtrack, co-wrote the text and talked about his own personal experience.

Dialogues on Humanity

The purpose of this contemporary art installation is to promote visitors' mindful engagement with art. Audiences are encouraged to formulate their own interpretations and to focus on their emotions while critically reflecting on the Humanitarian Principles and their application to daily life. As *Humanitarian principles. Here and Now* is intended for audience participation, the public is invited to actively "join in the conversation" and share their personal interpretations and experience. **#DialoguesOnHumanity**, an integral component of the project, is a platform for both on-site and on-line discussion and debate. Inspired by new and innovative angles, we invite you to engage, reflect and exchange.



Join in and share with us your personal thoughts, feelings, questions and stories in the worldwide conversation
#DialoguesOnHumanity.



NOTES





Acknowledgements

The Musée de l'Elysée, the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ICRC wish to express their deep gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the realisation of this project. Special thanks go to the artists for their enthusiasm and commitment to this project.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to all humanitarian workers around the world for putting their own lives at risk to help the people affected by natural disaster and armed conflict.

Conception and Production

This project is the result of a partnership between the Musée de l'Elysée and the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in conversation with the ICRC.

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HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES HERE AND NOW

Elysée
Lausanne



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Confédération suisse
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