



## Art and humanity: what is possible? Days of study. 29-30 April 2021

Today's humanitarian problems are more complex than they appear at first sight. Conflicts are becoming more drawn-out. It is not always clear who the protagonists are. The reasons for conflicts are often hard to discern and their level of violence is not linear. Natural disasters are more violent, more sudden, more frightening, and affect all levels of society. We are discovering the impact of pandemics, and all the unknown factors associated with them. The digitization of our societies is bringing new humanitarian problems; we hear talk of cyber warfare, the impact of fake news and propaganda on civilians and the dilemma of the digital divide.

Can art enable us to grasp these complexities and give them meaning? By creating space and time for reflection in ways that differ markedly from those offered by the media, can works of art that address humanitarian issues help us achieve a more nuanced and concrete understanding? How can we ensure that representations of these issues betray neither the people affected nor the situations themselves? Can public, artists and humanitarians benefit from getting to know each other better and learning from each other? Does a dialogue between art and humanitarian action promote individual and collective commitment? What can artistic imagination do when that of a whole people is reduced to ruins? Can the artist play the role of mediator?

Humanitarian issues are viewed mainly through the media, which can make them appear unrelated to everyday life. The media keep these issues at a comfortable distance. Even though they are often in the headlines, they are just pieces of information, like so many others, mediated through channels such as screens, newspapers and radio that can be laid aside at will. It is easy to keep them at a distance. As a result, it can seem that they are happening elsewhere, far away from us, and only affect others.

And yet these questions are not as distant from our own reality as we believe. We have all been feeling a degree of vulnerability and distress because of the COVID 19 pandemic. We are all aware of climate change and the effect it will have on our daily lives - especially our access to resources. And we have observed the rise of extreme nationalism and vengeful, warlike rhetoric in many parts of the world. Could it be that we will all be affected by a crisis, sooner or later?

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum, the Geneva Haute école d'art et de design (HEAD) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in partnership with the Geneva Red Cross, are providing an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between art and humanitarian action. A two-day colloquium on **29 and 30 April 2021** entitled "Art and humanity: what is possible?" will look at how public, artists and humanitarians can work together, and to what purpose. The discussions will involve a mixture of the theoretical and the practical, addressing four inter-related themes:

## **Represent**

- How does art address humanitarian situations?
- How do humanitarians use art to talk about crises?
- How can one look at vulnerability?
- What responsibilities do artists have when they represent humanitarian situations?

## **Interact**

- Can the humanitarian sphere bring new forms of interaction to art, and vice-versa?
- How can we move beyond representation?
- How can we build dialogue between artists and humanitarians?
- What are the roles of artists, humanitarians and the people affected by crisis?

## **Reconstruct**

- Can art enable us to perform an act of memory?
- Art as aid?
- What should be the role of art in mental reconstruction?
- How can one own one's vulnerability?

## **Anticipate**

- Are there parallels between the digitization of humanitarian action and the digitization of art?
- How does art enable us to reflect differently?
- Is the artist a visionary?
- What future does humanity have?

We are inviting proposals for 30-minute presentations at the colloquium. If you would like to give a presentation, please send a proposal (no more than 2,000 characters in length), together with your CV, to Julie Enckell Julliard, Philippe Stoll and Pascal Hufschmid, in the form of an email to Pierre-Antoine Possa (pap@redcrossmuseum.ch). Closing date is 18 December 2020. The languages of the colloquium will be French and English. This will be a hybrid event - on-site and online. The organizers will cover speakers' travel and accommodation costs in accordance with a predefined scale.

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