

# musée + C genève

musée international  
de la croix-rouge  
et du croissant-rouge

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## Press release

Geneva, 12 October 2021

### To Heal a World 160 Years of Photography from the Collections of the Red Cross

For its latest exhibition, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum (MICR) will tap into a unique yet little-known photographic heritage to explore humanitarian imagery and how it is perceived. *To Heal a World*, scheduled to run from 16 November 2021 to 24 April 2022, will feature over 600 photographs drawn from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement collections. To mark the opening, the MICR will hold an open day on Saturday, 20 November.

Humanitarian images entered people's daily lives over a century ago and are now a fixture in today's news. Such images often convey a sense of immediacy and certainty, setting a scene that allows for only one interpretation. Viewers think they fully understand the event in question without considering what lies just outside the frame. But the reality on the ground is always more complex than its representation, which is by nature merely a fragment.

#### Tapping into a rich photographic heritage

*To Heal a World* presents, in a variety of ways, more than 600 images dating from 1850 to the present. They include both public images used to communicate about humanitarian crises and more confidential ones, once reserved for internal use.

The works were carefully selected over the course of two years from a highly diverse yet little-known corpus of photos: the collections of the MICR, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

The broad scope of perspectives on display alerts viewers to the complexity of humanitarian work beyond the lens. A number of images were captured by well-known photographers - such as Werner Bischof, Susan Meiselas and Henri Cartier-Bresson from Magnum Photos agency - while others are the work of people employed by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement or people directly affected by crises. The exhibition ends with a selection of personal photographs collected from migrants by Alexis Cordesse.

*To Heal a World* was developed in association with the Rencontres d'Arles, an annual photography festival that will host the exhibition in 2022.

### **New ways of interpreting newsworthy images**

*To Heal a World* delivers a methodical analysis of the codes that underpin humanitarian imagery. Visitors are encouraged to view each image with a critical eye: where was it taken, what story does it tell, and what does it not show? In exploring the intentionality behind each work, the exhibition sets out a visual grammar of humanitarian action that can help to unlock meaning.

For Nathalie Herschdorfer, the exhibition curator, *To Heal a World* underscores the utilitarian role of photography and what these images have to say about the modern era: *"Much of what we know about the past, about history, has come to us through written texts. Yet we cannot trace the history of humanitarian action without taking into account the history of photography itself. The ICRC was founded in 1864, only 25 years after the invention of photography in 1839 - their destinies are inextricably linked. Today more than ever, humanitarian action without imagery is unthinkable."*

The MICR asks a fundamental question: how does humanitarian action concern all of us, here and now? This exhibition points to one possible answer. For Pascal Hufschmid, Executive Director of the MICR, who conceived the exhibition: *"To Heal a World is designed to shine a light on a rich photographic heritage at the heart of international Geneva. The exhibition prompts us to reconsider how we look at images of the conflicts and natural disasters that we see every day in the news. In the humanitarian sphere, an image is never worth a thousand words."*

## Carte blanche for photographer Henry Leutwyler in the MICR's collections

Alongside *To Heal a World*, the MICR is also showing a video created by Henry Leutwyler for NO'PHOTO, the 2021 photography biennale in Geneva. The video relates Leutwyler's photographic exploration of the Museum's exceptional and diverse collections. The artist's discerning, benevolent lens brings to life a series of unique objects, which then create a new narrative. Attentive to the smallest details, Leutwyler makes unexpected connections, reshaping the collections with a curious and poetic - yet exacting - touch. In this way, the collections' physicality and vulnerability are brought to the fore. Through his images, Leutwyler gives the objects a voice and challenges the visitor's perception of them.

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### *To Heal a World* *160 Years of Photography from the Collections of the Red Cross*

From 16 November 2021 to 24 April 2022  
Tuesdays to Sundays  
From 10am to 6pm

Open day on Saturday, 20 November, from 10am to 5pm

The exhibition is a joint production by the MICR and the Rencontres d'Arles photography festival. The works presented here are from the collections of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum (MICR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The exhibition received funding from the Swiss Confederation, the Republic and Canton of Geneva and the City of Geneva.

## The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum (MICR)

Av. de la Paix 17  
1202 Geneva  
Switzerland

## About the MICR

The mission of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum is to promote understanding of the history, current events and challenges of humanitarian aid by a wide audience in Switzerland and throughout the world, by encouraging contemporary artistic creation and developing innovative content with public and private partners from very different backgrounds and cultures. It thus constitutes and enhances a unique heritage, while stimulating a broad social, cultural and economic ecosystem in which it plays a central role.

The MICR asks a fundamental question: how does humanitarian action concern all of us, here and now? In order to reflect on this question with the visitor, the Museum invites artists and cultural partners to examine the issues, values and

current situation of humanitarian action. It thus asserts itself, in an open, agile and warm manner, as a place of memory, creation and debate. Through the production of original artistic content and the development of ambitious partnerships in Switzerland and throughout the world, the museum contributes to the influence of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and of Geneva.

### **About the Rencontres d'Arles**

The Rencontres d'Arles photography festival has featured some of the biggest names in this field since it was first run 50 years ago. Keeping pace with the latest trends in both practice and technology, this annual event serves as a springboard for up-and-coming talents and enables a wide audience to explore photography firsthand. The festival's programme brings together an eclectic mix of photographers and curators. Year after year, the festival documents a changing world through the eyes of photographers - who surely tell the story the best.