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STIGMATA

This exhibition was organised by the Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne, at the request of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum, Geneva.

**Temporary exhibition from 4 March through 26 July 2009
open 10am to 5pm, closed Tuesdays – Free Admission**

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- Brochure
- CD-Rom including:
 - press photos, captions, and rights information
 - press file text

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1. INTRODUCTION

Stigmata

In a world as overloaded with images and information as our own, how can we possibly continue to use photography as a means of talking about human suffering?

Today's photographers do not perceive their medium as a tool with which to illustrate reality or unveil the world. The 19th century took ample care of that. Above all, the image itself enables photographers to express personal thoughts and feelings about society, daily topics or world conflicts. Unlike photo-reporters who operate somehow like military commandos, the photographers assembled in this exhibition disrupt the harsh flux of live images churned out seemingly endlessly by television and the digital media. From their reflective stance, they demonstrate the intensity and complexity of suffering.

Stigmata groups together seven contemporary photographers:

- Gustave Germano (Argentina) ;
- Pieter Hugo (South Africa) ;
- Shai Kremer (Israel) ;
- Suzanne Opton (United States),
- Robert Polidori (Canada),
- Dana Popa (Rumania) and
- Christian Schwager (Switzerland).

From Africa to the Middle East, Argentina to Moldavia and the United States, their work seeks to capture our attention through pictures of both people and places dealing with situations of crisis, be it on the front line, or behind. More concerned by the aftermath of chaos than chaos itself, they all grasp the slight, obvious, or even ambiguous marks of past violence. Parallel to the media's outpourings, these photographs summon our consciousness to events deliberately sidelined.

This exhibition was organised by the Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne, at the request of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum.

2. WHY THIS EXHIBITION?

Stigmata is a photographic exhibition presenting seven contemporary photographers from around the world. Each of these individuals examines various circumstances of human suffering, situations that bear witness to the disregard for the most basic of human rights; these photographers, however, look at the **aftermath** of such events, rather than any present unfolding. Their lenses focus on the suffering felt at the loss of a loved one, the psychological effects of war or physical violence, and the contamination of countryside commandeered for armed conflicts or serving as a wartime theatre for combat.

A discussion of human suffering that neither directly displays this suffering nor casts it into the media spotlight is an original approach in our modern world, dominated as it is by the flux of images, especially violent ones.

Meditations on the traces of suffering left behind on landscapes, on people, are of particular interest to museums, precisely because they question the *after* of events and how such things endure.

Why bring this exhibition to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum?

The Museum is committed to using its exhibitions as opportunities to question events from a human perspective and to see what these events mean for the individual who experiences them.

These photographs bear witness to suffering and the violation of human rights; they deal with:

- ❑ forced migration – Dana Popa;
- ❑ the extermination of the other – Christian Schwager;
- ❑ the violence of war – Suzanne Opton and Shai Kremer;
- ❑ the devastation of a landscape after a natural disaster – Robert Polidori;
- ❑ genetic discrimination – Pieter Hugo;
- ❑ the vanished – Gustavo Germano.

Why this title?

Each of these photographs serves as evidence of the traces left behind, the repercussions on people and landscapes **after** the “disaster”. Specifically:

- Dana Popa looks at the traces left on young Moldovan girls, victims of sexual trafficking who managed to escape from their captors after having been taken into foreign lands.
- Christian Schwager looks at the traces to be exhumed (exhumations of bodies from communal graves) in the countryside of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where massacres took place during the war fought between the Serbs of Bosnia and the Bosnians (the massacre of Srebrenica, a Bosnian enclave).
- Shai Kremer looks at abandoned training sites created to simulate combat across the Israeli countryside. These training zones scar the landscape, just as other wounds have marked the local inhabitants.
- Suzanne Opton looks at the traces left by the war in Iraq on both the faces of American soldiers and Iraqi refugees.
- Robert Polidori looks at the traces left behind in the wake of a natural disaster, like those left by Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans.

- Pieter Hugo looks at the inherent traces on those individuals born with a genetic feature that sets them apart from those around them: the colour of their skin. Hugo offers a candid, unwavering view of these individuals, who are often considered to be bearers of bad omens and rejected by society.
- Gustavo Germano looks at the traces left behind by those who have forever vanished in the context of the Argentinean dictatorship from 1976 to 1983. The photographer links past to present in his works, revealing the difficulties encountered by families living with this kind of absence.

The camera's focus

All photographers place themselves in a precarious position with respect to the actual, direct photography of events. How, then, can we talk about the atemporality of certain events? How can this concept of timelessness be presented?

Stigmata offers visitors an opportunity to reflect upon the way in which the traces of human suffering and the vestiges of a natural disaster can permeate people and places. Are eyes the windows to the soul? Can a face laid upon a table tell us of the suffering a soldier has seen? How do we talk about the inexpressible? How do we convey the absence of a loved one?

Partners of the exhibition

The Musée de l'Elysée

The Musée de l'Elysée in Lausanne is one of the first museums in Europe to devote itself exclusively to photography. With a distinct focus on research and numerous collaborations with universities and other institutions, the museum has established itself as an authoritative organisation, in particular with respect to photographic representations of the body.

The exhibition organiser, Nathalie Herschdorfer

Nathalie Herschdorfer, an art historian, is the curator of the Musée de l'Elysée. She has worked for ten years with the museum's large, international exhibitions and their attendant publications. She is co-organiser of the exhibition *reGeneration: 50 Photographers of Tomorrow* and of the book *Faire faces: le nouveau portrait photographique* [*Facing the Future: The New Portrait of Photography*]. She was recently involved with the retrospectives of three major American photographers: Edward Steichen, Leonard Freed and Ray K. Metzker. She is the organiser of the exhibition *Teen City: The Adventure of Adolescence* and of the retrospective *Valérie Belin*. She is currently working on a retrospective devoted to the Italian photographer Carlo Valsecchi.

The Interfaculty Centre for Affective Sciences (ICAS)

The National Research Centre for the Affective Sciences is the first national research centre in the world dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of emotions and their effects on human behaviour and society. The Centre is financed by the Swiss Confederation and overseen by the Swiss National Science Foundation. It is hosted by the University of Geneva and brings together more than 100 researchers from various disciplines and levels of academia who are conducting research in the universities of Bern, Freiburg, Geneva, Neuchâtel and Zurich (www.Affective-sciences.org).

Support

This exhibition has benefited from the support of the Republic and Canton of Geneva, as well as from the assistance of Migros Cultural Percentage.



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3. THE EVOLUTION OF PHOTOJOURNALISM

A Short History

From the moment it first appeared, the world of the press and news reporting was instantly seduced by the apparent objectivity of the photographic image. However, there exists a significant time lag between the image itself and the event it relates, caused by the considerable delay between when the photo is taken and when it is published. In 1890, with the invention of the half-tone process, illustrated journalism flourished around the world. "With photography, a window is opened onto the world." (Gisèle Freund) The foreign became familiar. The journalist/photographer pairing was progressively replaced by the news photographer who tackled his subject alone. He became a fully-fledged journalist and no longer needed the support of a writer, his mechanical machine playing the same role as the television camera and microphone. The big newspapers – *Life*, *Fortune*, *Paris-Match* – hired teams of several dozen photojournalists who travelled the world, or they used photojournalists from the press agencies. This was the era of the "News", with Robert Capa its legendary archetype. The photojournalists of the 1960s roamed the battlefields, from Vietnam to Biafra, from Pakistan to Northern Ireland. Today, the future of this profession is unclear. New technologies and the emergence of digital cameras are redefining professional practices, and photojournalism finds itself at a crossroads.

All witnesses, all producers of images

Thanks to two major and tragic events – the abuse in Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison and the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean – 2004 called into question the traditional practices of photojournalism and definitively demonstrated that nothing will ever be the same. In both instances, these events were characterised by images recorded by amateurs and immediately broadcast worldwide by means of digital technology. Equipped with a digital recorder, a digital camera, or a mobile phone with either photo or record functions, anybody and everybody is now capable of producing images and video, and broadcasting them over the Internet.

What use are professionals?

This new reality presents many questions for both the photojournalists who have dedicated their lives to reporting current events and to the media that have based their businesses on publishing them. Photographers are still the best bet for the illustrated press. They are the ones who choose to go out into the field with their own, unique perspectives that television, always frantic with its own immediacy, cannot even envisage; the ones who choose to question aspects of our societies over the long term, to reveal them in ways that television's grand machines cannot; and those who inauspiciously slip into the field and blend into its background so they might reveal, re-shape, scratch where there is an itch and bring the image into the wound. When the illustrated press was established in the 1920s, it put the photographer into the spotlight; we must do this again now, question our modern technologies and the limits and abilities of both photography itself and its technologies to transport us outside the metaphorical box.

Sources:

'L'histoire du photojournalisme [The History of Photojournalism]', Wikipedia (French)

'Mort et résurrection du photojournalisme [The Death and Resurrection of Photojournalism]', Christian Caujolle, *Le Monde diplomatique*, 2005

4. THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

Robert Polidori (Canada, born in 1951)

Title of work: "New Orleans", 2005-06

Origin of works: Flowers East, London

As a paradigm of the end of time, the natural disaster has been given ample attention in the arts, and most of the world's peoples have their deluge myth. In another register, we saw the media take over the disaster caused by hurricane Katrina in the southeastern United States in 2005, flooding the world with images of ravaged landscapes, a submerged city, heaped-up cars, trees blown over, the insides of homes destroyed and an entire population displaced. Robert Polidori – the "psychological witness" – also went to New Orleans after the hurricane.

The human figure is absent from these scenes of devastation, yet these interiors and houses directly evoke the people who lived in them. Calamities in distant countries are a familiar spectacle, but what are we to think of such chaos in New Orleans, in one of the world's most technologically advanced countries? Polidori takes his time: a view camera provides the precise detail he accentuates in his large-format prints, while long exposure times do away with the need for artificial lighting. This *modus operandi* goes counter to the practice of the standard photojournalist, who plunges into the heart of the event like a commando. Polidori rejects immediacy.

The point of documentary photography is not only to provide an image of the tangible world, but also to shape that world formally. In painting, the depiction of disaster has links with the sublime, and Polidori's photographs convey a similar imaginative effect. The profusion of detail summons the viewer to silent contemplation of the ruins, while at the same time – like the great mythical narratives – triggering emotion with the spectacle of human fragility and the fear of annihilation.

Gustavo Germano (Argentina, born in 1964)

Title of work: "Ausencias [Absences]", 2006-07

Origin of works: the artist, Barcelona

Gustavo Germano offers images of the indirect victims of the Argentinean military dictatorship's liquidation plan of 1976–83, which caused the disappearance of 30,000 people. Using album photos going back thirty years, Germano photographed the victims' families in the same places and under similar circumstances, leaving empty the space previously occupied by the vanished loved one. In this association of past and present the photographer illustrates how hard it is for the families to live with this kind of absence.

Omar Darío Amestoy and his brother Mario Alfredo on a country outing; Eduardo Raúl Germano, the eldest of the family, posing with his three brothers before going on holidays; Orlando René Méndez, his wife Leticia Margarita Oliva and their daughter Laura visiting their grandparents. For the viewer, these three images of happiness shared with loved ones are oddly familiar: they could be from his own family album.

The experience of death has been one of the most powerful forces behind the urge to create images. The image then represents a response or reaction to death seen as the absence of a family member. In Germano's work, paradoxically, it is through their absence in the second image that the vanished take on physical form. The impact of his images – simple, direct portraits of the lost loved ones – lies in a potent emotional charge underscored by absolute authenticity.

Dana Popa (Romania, born in 1977)

Title of work: "Not Natasha", 2006

Origin of works: the artist, London

Lied to, abused, locked away, sold, kidnapped, exploited – Dana Popa's young women have learnt what real suffering is all about. Yet her reportage shows nothing of their periods of captivity; instead Popa photographed these victims of sex trafficking on their return home to Moldavia, so crushed by shame and silence that even their own bodies seem a burden.

The network of the traffic in human beings that sprang up in Eastern Europe after the collapse of Communism extends to several countries. Here the photographer has opted for discretion in her portrayal of women who have escaped the clutches of the traffickers and found a place in one of the programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration. These young adults who should still be living a carefree life must now learn to come to terms with the violence they have endured and build new futures for themselves.

Traditionally, the caption accompanying a photograph is neutral and objective: date, place, name. Popa, however, adds details gleaned from her encounters: this way, the victims are no longer anonymous and their accounts provide enough detail for the viewer to imagine their ordeal. And then, all of a sudden, a dramatic shift takes place: the information on the subjects' age and identity, and the bits and pieces of their stories trigger indignation in the viewer as the sheer intensity of their distress is made visible.

Pieter Hugo (South Africa, born in 1976)

Title of work: "Albinos", 2003

Origin of works: Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

Over the last fifty years photography has accustomed us to seeing postcolonial Africa as a continent of beings in distress, victims of famine, genocide, epidemics and war. The focus is constantly on iniquitous suffering. Pieter Hugo's frank, direct portraits, by contrast, confront us with people who are inherently 'different': victims of albinism, whom we look at with a certain reluctance.

Whereas black skin is seen by Westerners as a sign of otherness, albinism is not universally understood as a genetic condition. Even today, and especially in Africa, albinos are looked upon either as bearers of ill-fortune or figures to be worshipped, their physical singularity being taken as a sign of magical powers. Subjected to physical attack and even amputation, the albinos of certain parts of Africa lead hunted lives, excluded from their native communities. When they die – most often of skin cancer – they are hidden by their families, who believe supernatural forces dwell within them.

Pieter Hugo's reportage sets out to change the perception of albinos by showing how definition of identity, solely in terms of physical difference, can undermine social status and infiltrate everyday life. In particular, he uses the studio close-up to force the viewer to modify his way of seeing; and in doing so, he restores to his subjects the humanity that has been denied them.

Christian Schwager (Switzerland, born in 1974)

Title of work: "My Lovely Bosnia", 2003-04

Origin of works: the artist, Winterthur

Christian Schwager's Bosnian landscapes seem havens of peace. Yet these images evoke truly dreadful events, for three mass graves were found here in 2004. Working at the scene more than ten years after the war, Schwager is at variance with traditional images of war and their emphasis on the visually forceful. In a world drenched in images and information, he has chosen to approach his distressing subject in a reflective vein.

The viewer of war images expects the photograph to bear witness, to show things pretty much as they happened. At the end of the Second World War, for example, the photographs of the Nazi death camps and their countless bodies had real shock value: authentic testimony, they remain etched on our memories, and now the very notion of atrocities and war crimes is tied to the requirement of photographic proof. Genocide is absent from Schwager's pictures, but the places photographed refer directly to the massacres; and as our suspicion gradually grows, contaminating the photographs one by one, the beauty of the landscapes is driven out by other, interior images of the Balkans at war.

Just when it seemed that Europe had done with horror, there came the return of sieges, death camps and wholesale massacres of civilians. Accustomed for forty years to wars that took place in 'exotic', distant settings, Westerners were stunned to see an entire region of Europe caught up in this torment. So similar to our own, Schwager's landscapes remind us of just how close Bosnia is.

Suzanne Opton (United States, born in 1950)

Title of work: 'Soldiers and Citizen', 2005-07

Origin of works: Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne and the artist, New York

By asking her subjects to place their heads on a table, Suzanne Opton chose an unusual, troubling procedure for these portraits of American soldiers on leave from Iraq. Apart from enemy combatants, soldiers have never been shown in this way, with the upper part of the body horizontal in a pose suggesting wounds, death or defeat. The result is at the opposite pole from the standard military imagery: here, courage, determination and panache are supplanted by fragility, vulnerability and humanity. Stripped of all identifying features, these men, undergoing additional training at Fort Drum in New York State, agreed to pose frankly and candidly.

Following up her exploration of the war, the photographer then went to Jordan to meet Iraqi refugees. Opting for a similar approach, she decided to concentrate on the faces of people who had left their families and their country behind; these exiles with no notion of what the future holds agreed to reveal their vulnerability by posing lying down.

The camera invites intimacy on the viewer's part, but for Opton excessive intimacy is to be avoided: "Taking these portraits, I simply wanted to observe the faces of people who have seen the unforgettable." Can a photograph really lay bare its subject's soul? By naming her subjects and their professions, Opton is trying to involve the viewer more than if he were looking at anonymous portraits, but the question remains open: of what terrifying scenes are these people prisoners?

Shai Kremer (Israel, born in 1974)

Title of work: 'Infected Landscape', 2004-07

Origin of works: Herzelyia Museum in Herzelyia, Israel

How to depict military conflict? In the 19th century, during the Crimean War and the Civil War in America, photographers were initially uncertain about this, and their first subjects were army camps, cities in wartime and military equipment. Quickly, however, the focus shifted to more visually disturbing material: the dead. Since then, the media have endlessly deluged us with scenes of battle and of desperate, wounded victims.

For the last ten years Shai Kremer has been working in one of the world's most media-intensive hotspots: the Israel-Palestine conflict is constantly covered, while other wars draw relatively little attention. For Kremer, Israel, as a territory inhabited since the most ancient times by different peoples and the scene of endless conflicts, is 'infected' by the virus of war. The proof is its landscape, dotted with reminders of military strife, past and present.



Focusing on the hitherto secret site of Tze'elim – an Israeli army training base in the Negev Desert – the photographer has nonetheless chosen to exclude all human presence in favour of a more wide-ranging consideration of occupation. The cardboard sets formerly used for training purposes have been replaced by a modern, simulated Arab city, complete with mosque, casbah, hospital, main square, streets and houses. Nothing is missing from Tze'elim, in the Negev Desert. Kremer shows no manoeuvres or military exercises in this zone created to hone urban fighting skills, yet the viewer can readily imagine exchanges of fire taking place.

5. THE EVENTS IN QUESTION

1) Hurricane Katrina (2005)

Sources:

"Katrina" Mike Davis, *Le monde diplomatique*, October 2005

'Bush dans l'œil du cyclone [Bush in the Eye of the Storm]'. United States, 11 September 2005, Samy Ghorbal, JeuneAfrique.com

2) The Argentinean Dictatorship (1976-1983)

Source:

"Argentine [Argentina]", Encyclopaedia Microsoft® Encarta® online 2008

<http://fr.encarta.msn.com> © 1997-2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

3) Illegal Immigration

Source:

"Moldavie : migrations, traite des êtres humains et action humanitaire [Moldova: migrations, the slave trade, and humanitarian action]". Excerpts from the article by Paola Baril, published in *La revue humanitaire* no.11 (autumn 2004), journal edited by Médecins du Monde [Doctors of the World].

Title of article. Figures taken from *Courrier international*: May-June 2008, p. 39

4) Albinism

Sources:

Anna Agnès Nagy. "Magie noire sur fond bicolore [Black Magic on a Two-tone Background]", thesis, Interfaculty Centre for Affective Sciences (ICAS) – University of Geneva

"Les albinos, victimes de sacrifices humains [Albinos: Victims of Human Sacrifice]", Stéphanie Plasse, Afrik.com, 3 May 2008

5) The Bosnian War (1992-1995)

Source:

'yougoslave, conflit [Yugoslavia, Conflict]' Encyclopaedia Microsoft® Encarta® online 2008

<http://fr.encarta.msn.com> © 1997-2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

6) The War in Iraq

Sources:

"Irak [Iraq]" Encyclopaedia Microsoft® Encarta® online 2008

<http://fr.encarta.msn.com> © 1997-2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

"4,2 millions de réfugiés irakiens [4.2 Million Iraki Refugees]", Voltaire.net.org, <http://www.voltairenet.org/article151939.html>

7) The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Sources:

Mourre, Michel. "Israël [Israel]", "Israélo-arabes (guerres) [Israeli-Arabs (Wars)]", and "Palestine" in *Dictionnaire encyclopédique d'histoire [Encyclopaedic Dictionary of History]*, Larousse-Bordas, Paris, 1996, pp.2899 to 2910, pp. 2910 to 2912, pp. 4120 to 4126.

Chronologie du conflit israélo-palestinien de 2002 à nos jours [Chronology of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from 2002 to Today] (document archived in 2006, in *Le Monde diplomatique*, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cahier/proche-orient/a12330>)

"israélo-arabe, conflit [Israeli-Arab, Conflict]" Encyclopaedia Microsoft® Encarta® online 2008 <http://fr.encarta.msn.com> © 1997-2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

6. IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE EXHIBITION

Tours

Guided tours for groups

Information and booking
Tel. +41 22 748 95 06

Free guided tours (no booking required)

Sunday 15 March, 5 April, 3 May and 7 June 2009 at 11 am

Schools

Tours for educators:

Monday 9 March at 5pm and Wednesday 11 March 2009 at 12.30pm

Educational aids

Information and booking:
Tel. +41 22 748 95 06
www.micr.org/edu

Debate

Tuesday 17 March 2009, at 6.30pm

Chic or shock, which photos?

Mr. Luc Chessex

Photographer

Mr. Christian Schwager

Photographer, presented in the exhibition

Moderator

Mr. Luc Debraine

Journalist, *Le Temps*

Tour-Lecture

Tuesday 24 March 2009, at 6.30pm

3 perspectives on the exhibition, brought together in a single tour

Black Magic on a Two-tone Background

Ms. Agnès Nagy

Department of Antiquities, University of Geneva

Image and meaning: from stimulation to emotion

Dr. Didier Grandjean

National Research Centre for the Affective Sciences, University of Geneva



Les dormeurs du val [*The Sleepers of the Vale*]
Mr. Marc Kolakowski
Department of Antiquities, University of Geneva

Discussion

Tuesday 7 April 2009, at 6.30pm
Frozen Emotion: traces of feeling

Discussion with **Professor Klaus Scherer**
Director of the National Research Centre for the Affective Sciences, University of Geneva

led by **Ms. Isabelle Moncada**
Journalist from the TSR

General Information

Open from 10am to 5pm, closed Tuesdays
Boutique – Restaurant
From the Cornavin train station: Bus number 8 (towards OMS or Appia), Appia stop
Access for disabled

The full calendar of events organised in conjunction with the exhibition is available online at www.micr.org