



PRESS RELEASE

Geneva, 11 October 2022

# A FRAGILE BALANCE

NEW EXHIBITION, 9 NOVEMBER 2022  
TO 12 MARCH 2023

**How do we keep our bearings in a world that's changing at a dizzying speed? Where will we find new points of reference? What, ultimately, does our balance depend on? As part of its Year of Mental Health (2022–2023), the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum has given carte blanche to three contemporary Swiss artists: Denise Bertschi, Nicolas Cilins and Nina Haab. Their unique productions, together with a sculpture by Olafur Eliasson, explore our physical and mental limits and make us mindful of our inner balance. *A Fragile Balance* is an invitation to become fully present in the moment through a process of discovering, feeling, doing and letting go.**

This new exhibition, which is the centrepiece of the Museum's Year of Mental Health (2022–2023), features large-scale installations by three contemporary Swiss artists – Denise Bertschi (Aargau), Nicolas Cilins (Geneva) and Nina Haab (Ticino) – along with *Geometric lines for horizons*, a sculpture by Olafur Eliasson. Together, these pieces create a subtle, welcoming space for reflection.

## Placing care front and centre

*A Fragile Balance* underscores the role of art as a powerful vehicle for caring for oneself and for others. The exhibits are not there to be contemplated. Rather, they offer an immersive experience that invites us to let go and feel fully present in the moment – to pause and reflect on our own limits and vulnerabilities, in all their diversity and complexity, and to take a moment to practise self-care.

For Elisa Rusca, the Museum's chief curator and organizer of the exhibition, *A Fragile Balance* is akin to a balance pole: "The idea behind the exhibition is to highlight the tipping points between the near and the far, the individual and the collective, the private and the public, the bodily and the symbolic. It invites us to embrace the fragility of our balance."

Despite the apparent diversity of their approaches, all three artists take collective memory as their starting point, exploring how we acknowledge and push beyond our limits through body movement (Cilins), neutrality (Bertschi) and the interplay between nature and culture (Haab).

— **Healing Routine by Nicolas Cilins: what body movements tell us about our relationship with ourselves and others**

Healing Routine is an immersive installation and the result of a collective endeavour: Nicolas Cilins and a group of International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum employees attended weekly dance therapy workshops led by Suzanne Z'Grabben and Maroussia Ehrnrooth.

With this installation, which was filmed at the Museum, Cilins addresses mental health through body movement. Can dance become a tool for understanding oneself and others? Can art heal everyday life? *Healing Routine* explores the body as much as the surrounding architecture. During the creative process, everyone had the opportunity to delve within themselves while exploring other ways of inhabiting the museum space. The resulting installation, which is not without humour, questions artistic therapies, the place of the artist and the role of the museum.

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*"I'm particularly interested in fragile balances. With Healing Routine, I wanted to explore this idea in a uniquely local way, which is why I chose the Museum as the setting. Dance therapy was a way to observe both what happens when people come together and what these coming-togethers do for or say about the participants."*

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— Nicolas Cilins (b. 1985)

— **ONE NATURAL BORDER by Nina Haab: crossing natural barriers :**

The limits of reality and the intersection between collective and personal memory lie at the heart of Nina Haab's artistic practice. She spent several years exploring well-known sites in the Swiss Alps: the Devil's Bridge, the Gotthard Pass and the Nufenen Pass. These iconic sites serve a dual purpose, acting as both natural barriers and passageways.

*ONE NATURAL BORDER* is the culmination of several years of filming in different seasons, tracking the opening and closing of mountain passes. On the two large screens, images of untamed natural landscapes scroll by, to a soundtrack of voices speaking different languages. Here, these dialects – created and preserved by the existence of natural barriers – meet in a ritual as old as time itself: placing the common good at the centre of collective action.

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*"In ONE NATURAL BORDER, the two large screens stand close together, creating an immersive space – as if we were stepping into the place where two cultures meet. The experience invites us to reflect on ourselves, our origins and our affinities. Which side are we more familiar with: north or south?"*

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— Nina Haab (b. 1985, Bellinzona)

— **State Fiction by Denise Bertschi: exploring the limits of archival materials**

The notion of borders and the role of neutrality in the construction of the Swiss identity narrative are central to Denise Bertschi's work. From her point of view, being neutral is a complex and fragile state. In *State Fiction: Neutral Only on the Outside*, she focuses on the role of Switzerland in the neutral military mission to observe the ceasefire between the two Koreas. Following her travels in the region, she immersed herself in the Korea collection of the Library Am Guisanplatz in Bern, consulting images and films captured by Swiss military personnel. She discovered unexpected photographs of everyday life: personnel eating meals and meeting local communities, as well as pictures of the surrounding landscapes. Through a film, a photography book and a series of flags, *State Fiction* exploits this archival material while simultaneously questioning its limits.

Bertschi continued her exploration for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum. Working with historian Daniel Palmieri, she delved into the ICRC archives. There, she discovered objects and first-hand accounts from delegate Jean Courvoisier, who was active in Korea in 1952. These items, which are presented in a display case, document the complex, multifaceted relationship between personal narratives and collective history.

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*“State Fiction questions the principle of neutrality by exploring the balance and fragility of the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. The creation of this hard border between the two countries is a matter of established fact. But history and visual culture show that, on the question of balance, there is no absolute answer. That’s why I’m interested in exploring a variety of different narratives, each of which necessarily reflects prevailing geopolitical tensions.”*

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– Denise Bertschi (b. 1983, Aarau)

The three installations are presented alongside a sculpture by Olafur Eliasson: a glass sphere, partially silvered and painted, with thin lines cut out along its surface. When viewers peer into the sphere, the geometry is reflected again and again in the mirror finish that coats the inner surface. *Geometric lines for horizons* takes us into a mysterious world without limits.

## A highlight of the Museum’s Year of Mental Health

Through *A Fragile Balance* and its Year of Mental Health (2022–2023), which began in September, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum invites us to re-examine our vulnerabilities, touching on a long-standing issue in the humanitarian sector that has risen to the top of the public agenda in recent times. In the forthcoming programming cycle, the Museum will work with academics, artists and humanitarian practitioners to explore ideas and approaches we can apply in our day-to-day lives.

For Pascal Hufschmid, the Museum’s executive director, this approach is a concrete expression of what it means to be a hub serving the local community: “By selecting this theme for the coming year, we are reaffirming our role as an open, welcoming space that brings communities together, invites conversations about mental health and helps break the stigma surrounding it. Above all, it is an exercise in turning ideas into deeds: we want to transform knowledge into action and be an organization that learns with its visitors.”

While it will not be possible to cover every angle, the Museum will seek to explore different avenues and give space to diverse voices on this complex subject, inviting visitors to reflect on the notion of care in what, for many, is an unconventional setting. For its forthcoming programming cycle, the Museum will deliver mental-health first-aid courses for the public, hold a series of events on mental health in the humanitarian sector and beyond, offer “emergency yoga” classes, run guided tours with two experts in emotion, and develop a practical guide on kindness through a co-creation process (for full details, visit [redcrossmuseum.ch/en](http://redcrossmuseum.ch/en)).

## New initiative: Community Sundays

As a hub serving the local community, the Museum is once again aligning its actions with its words through the new Community Sundays initiative.

On the first Sunday of each month, visitors will be able to buy additional admission tickets. The Museum will donate these tickets to the Geneva Red Cross, which will then redistribute them among its beneficiaries. In time, the initiative will be expanded to include other local non-profits. By putting admission tickets “on tab” in this way, visitors will be doing their bit to bring culture within everyone’s reach.

On Community Sundays, there will be a wealth of activities and surprises in store for visitors, from yoga classes and special tours to meet-the-author events, local produce stalls and more.

The Museum will hold its first Community Sunday on 6 November.

- Programme:
- 11 am: yoga class with Donna Williams, Regional Head of Resource Mobilization at the ICRC and founder of *emergencyoga*.
  - 2 pm: participatory workshop and discussion on compassion with Patricia Cenardas and Olga Klimecki, researchers at the Swiss Centre for Affective Sciences (University of Geneva).
  - 3:30 pm: talk and book signing with Pierre Hazan to mark the release of his new book, *Négocié avec le diable : La médiation dans les conflits armés* (published by Éditions Textuel).

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## ÉQUILIBRES PRÉCAIRES | A FRAGILE BALANCE

New exhibition, 9 November 2022 to 12 March 2023

Carte blanche given to Denise Bertschi, Nicolas Cilins and Nina Haab

Installation by Olafur Eliasson, on loan from the David H. Brolliet Collection, Geneva/Dakar  
An experience in learning, feeling, doing and letting go

*Healing Routine* by Nicolas Cilins, commissioned by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum and co-produced with the Municipal Council of the City of Geneva

**Press previews: 7 and 8 November 2022**

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Artist and researcher **Denise Bertschi** (b. 1983, Aarau) is a PhD candidate at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) and HEAD – Genève. Her work critically examines Switzerland's relationship with the rest of the world, in particular through collective memory and cultural myths. In 2020, she was awarded the Manor Art Award, and her work has been exhibited in Switzerland and abroad (at the Aargauer Kunsthaus, the Swiss Art Awards, the Landesmuseum Zurich and the Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris).

**Nicolas Cilins** (b. 1985) is a conceptual video, performance and installation artist. He holds a Bachelor's degree in visual arts from the Villa Arson, Nice, and a diploma in performance art from HEAD – Genève. His works, which are often created in collaboration with individuals and communities, have been shown in numerous museums and festivals, including the Berlin International Film Festival, the Moscow Planetarium, the MAC/VAL in Paris, the Museum of Fine Arts Bern and the Bâtie-Festival de Genève.

**Nina Haab** (b. 1985, Bellinzona) holds a Master's degree in visual arts from HEAD – Genève. Her work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Switzerland and beyond, including at the Kunstmuseum Olten, the GAM Torino and the Kunst-Werke Studiolo in Berlin. In 2012, she received a Swiss Art Award in Basel. She was shortlisted for the Prix Mobilère for young Swiss artists in 2019, and she was awarded a grant from the Abraham Hermanjat Foundation in 2020. Haab's works feature in the collections of the Contemporary Art Fund of the City of Geneva (FMAC), the Fondazione Archivio Fotografico Roberto Donetta in Corzoneso, and the Musée Jenisch in Vevey.

The works of **Olafur Eliasson** explore the relevance of art in the world at large. Born in 1967, Eliasson grew up in Iceland and Denmark, where he studied from 1989 to 1995 at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. In 1995, he moved to Berlin and founded Studio Olafur Eliasson, which today comprises a large team of craftsmen, architects, archivists, researchers, administrators, cooks, programmers, art historians and specialized technicians. Since 1997, his wide-ranging solo shows – featuring installations, paintings, sculptures, photography and film – have appeared in major museums around the globe.