

The Diplomacy of Art: Irish, Spanish and Latin American Artwork in a Historic Building of Geneva

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Abstract: This article focuses on the works of art offered by Irish, Spanish, Brazilian and other governments and institutions to embellish the Centre William Rappard since 1926 to date. The Centre William Rappard is the first building in Geneva designed to house an international organization. It was built for the International Labour Office, and later occupied by the United Nations High Commissioner for the Refugees, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade secretariat, and currently the World Trade Organization. The article studies the messages sent by powerful players of international relations who donate, receive, restore and sometimes suppress works of art to support their political aims.²

Keywords: *Art history, International relations, censorship*

Introduction

On a clear Sunday morning on 6 June 1926, Albert Thomas led a group of international personalities into the recently opened building of the International Labour Office (ILO) (Fig. 1). They arrived at the main entrance, went between the large stone female sculptures “Peace” and “Justice” by Luc Jaggi, through the wooden door donated by Australia and a vestibule into the profusely decorated neoclassical main hall. Thomas, an experienced French politician who had been minister of arms and ammunitions during World War I was appointed, somehow paradoxically, to lead the ILO in times of peace. The International Labour Organization was one of the institutions created by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The other was the League of Nations, which would later become the United Nations Organization (UN) and would integrate the ILO as one of its specialized agencies in 1948.

Art Deco geometric patterns prevail on the gleaming floor of the main entrance hall, the elegant furniture, the ceiling and even inside the elevator (a “paternoster” lift). Thomas and the procession of dignitaries admired the artworks that have been ordered by the architect, Lausanne-born Georges Épitaux (1873-1957). The monumental “Genius” guarding the building on its north façade and the “Three Graces” on the lake-side terrace were sculpted by Maurice Sarki (1882-1946). Léon Perrin (1886-1978) from Neuchâtel created the decorative haut-reliefs on the original façades and the library’s ceiling, depicting stylized images of labor. Many other decoration details were conceived under the spirit of the peace- and justice-seeking mission that the new international

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² The choice of Irish, Spanish and Brazilian artwork does not obey to other design than adapting the framework of this article to a journal dedicated to Irish-Latin American relations. This is further developed in the concluding remarks.



Figure 1: International Labour Office (ILO) building, Geneva, Switzerland.

organization received from its member governments, employer institutions and workers trade unions and federations.

Hopeful and optimistic thoughts filled the public present at this important event. In the early 1920s the world was hungry for peace. People were marked by the horrors of World War I together with international social turmoil that followed the Bolshevik Revolution and extreme nationalism, protectionism and racist and imperialist views in international relations. The League of Nations and the ILO were the first international organizations with a broad mandate to attain peace and harmony in the world societies. The Centre William Rappard was a solid metaphor of the optimistic times. But human history is not rational and it is rarely linear. A few years later, another catastrophic conflict would confront most nations.

In 1977, the ILO departed from the building and moved to its current office in Grand Saconnex, in the international quarter of Geneva. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) secretariat and the United Nations High Commissioner for the Refugees (UNHCR) moved into the Centre William Rappard, together with the Graduate Institute of International Studies library. When the GATT became the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, this new organization occupied the whole building. Further renovations and the construction of a new annex were performed in 2008-2013.

National governments, professional associations and trade unions wished to leave their mark in the historic building. Gifts were offered and displayed in prominent places. With the change of people and customs, some artwork was hidden or even destroyed. At the present time, works of

art from Ireland, Spain, Brazil and other countries are a landmark in the building and are appreciated by hundreds of diplomatic visitors, trade experts and international civil servants working in the building.

In August 2001, I joined the WTO as a publishing officer and started working in a lakeside office of the majestic Centre William Rappard. In awe, I went everyday through its historic conference rooms and sober corridors feeling the ghostly presence of so many past visitors, foremost international personalities and officers of various organizations that had been working and conferencing between these walls over decades. Less than six weeks later, after I joined, the September 11 attacks changed the world. In the following years, as it happened with many public offices in most cities, the building was equipped with security guards, cameras, defense devices and a perimeter barrier system. Fear became a complex and expensive business disguised behind the “security” euphemism.

The works of art in the Centre William Rappard followed the metamorphosis of the building and the organizations housed in it.³ Some were donated, later covered or destroyed, and finally rediscovered and restored. Others were placed in prominent positions in the building and subsequently downgraded to almost hidden locations. Others still, such as the first Irish gift discussed below, didn't arrived in Geneva although they were conceived to decorate the building. I focus on some of these changes to show the volatility of human design within the context of the international organizations.



Figure 2: The Brazil Room, Centre William Rappard, Geneva.

³ The building and its adjacent park are named after William Emmanuel Rappard (1883-1858), Swiss diplomat and scholar who played a major role in bringing the League of Nations to Geneva in the early 1920s. A virtual tour of the Centre William Rappard is available at the WTO website: <https://www.wto.org/vt/index.html> (cited 12 December 2019).

The Geneva Window that never arrived to Geneva (and went to Miami)

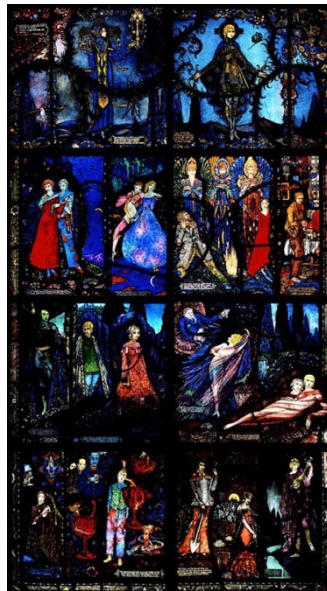


Figure 3: *Geneva Window* (1930), Harry Clarke (1889-1931), stained-glass window, 180 cm high, 100 cm wide.

The ILO was the first international organization that the Irish Free State joined in 1923. Two years later, to assert the fragile sovereignty, the young government proceeded to re-ratify the ILO conventions previously ratified by the British administration (Ó Cearbhaill, 1980: 25). With a negative perception of the League of Nations among some of the Irish leaders, the ILO was at any rate an important international forum to get recognition to Ireland.⁴

The Irish Free State was one of the first governments to react to an ILO international call in 1924 for artistic contributions to decorate their new building in Geneva. Negotiations in the League of Nations were complex due to the British powerful position and their strategy to represent the empire's dominions as a whole instead of granting them a free hand to defend their own interests. Instead, within the context of the ILO British predominance was not undisputed. Furthermore, negotiation subjects were more technical and less politically-manipulated. Hence, the Irish government made great efforts to gain international recognition as an autonomous republic. This was a pragmatic reason to actively participate in the new labor international organization in Geneva and to support its request for artwork.

In November 1926, the government commissioned Harry Clarke (1889-1931), a well-known artist and illustrator to produce a decoration for the Centre William Rappard. The first idea was to create

⁴ Even if in the 1930s Éamon De Valera played a leading role in the League of Nations, initially he characterized the organization as “simply the form of tyranny . . . an association to perpetuate power for those who had got it”; Harry Boland condemned it on the grounds that “any scheme built up by the British Government and by the Cecils must necessarily be evil to Ireland”; a French supporter of the Irish cause claimed that “little else could be expected from an organization run by Freemasons in the city of Calvin” (Keatinge 1970: 135).

five stained-glass windows to brighten the central section of the sweeping staircase. However, a German gift of five windows by Max Pechstein had already been accepted by the ILO. Another location on a different staircase was selected for a window, just outside the office of the Deputy Director of the ILO (it is now the meeting room of the WTO Deputy Directors-General). Clarke envisaged eight panels of a stained-glass window, including illustrated texts from fifteen Irish writers, such as W.B. Yeats, Lennox Robinson, Liam O’Flaherty, George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce and others. Yeats and Robinson were extremely enthusiastic about the project and made many suggestions. Clarke’s scheme, including “illustrations of extracts of texts by modern Irish writers on eight panels, was a highly original take on the project as the other ILO artworks either stuck rigidly to the theme of labour or were largely decorative” (Kennedy 2019: 77). Based on Clarke’s reputation as a religious stained-glass artist, the Irish government “gave its approval to the scheme without seeing the final design” (Kennedy 2018: 112).

In 1930, with great difficulty owing to an advanced lung illness, Clarke completed what came to be known as the *Geneva Window* (Fig. 3). However, the conservative elites in the new republic, driven by strict moralities and fearing the reaction of the powerful Roman Catholic hierarchy, were not ready to accept the modernist, playful and erotic aesthetics in Clarke’s window. The Irish President William Cosgrave and other officers rejected the artwork. They disliked some panels, including the one illustrating O’Flaherty’s novel *Mr Gilhooley* that depicted a drunkard “leering at a young woman, who dances naked before him, her body partly masked by the folds of a diaphanous mantle” (Kennedy 2018: 113).⁵ Cosgrave considered that those were “subjects that would displease” in Geneva (113), and objected to “scenes from certain authors... as representative of Irish literature and culture”, indirectly referring to some Protestant writers selected by Clarke (Bowe 2002: 121). The Secretary at the Department of Industry and Commerce R.C. Ferguson wrote that the window portrayed the Irish as “a bizarre almost viciously evil people steeped in sex and drunkenness and, yes, sin” (Kennedy 2019: 87). Regarding the scene of “the almost naked male figure [that] clasps his companion’s hand to his crotch”, the bishop of Killaloe stated in 1931 that it was a “pity that Clarke had chosen to ‘immortalise’ a group who did not represent ‘the mind or character of Ireland’” (Kennedy 2018: 113).

After Clarke died of tuberculosis in Davos, Switzerland, in 1931, his widow Margaret Clarke continued dealing with the government. She bought back the *Geneva Window* from the authorities and it remained in their studio until the 1960s. In 1988, Clarke’s sons sold the window to the philanthropist and collector Mitchell Wolfson Jr., and it is now a central piece of the Wolfsonian-FIU Museum in the Art Deco district of Miami Beach, Florida. In 1997, the Wolfsonian collection was donated to Florida International University.

According to the art historian Róisín Kennedy, “Clarke chose to celebrate an aspect of Irish cultural life that was coming under fire from official legislation. ... Its open references to sexuality were extremely rare in art in the Free State” (2018: 114). The negative reception by the government reflects the leaders’ conservative views and their fear towards the rigidity of the Catholic establishment in late 1920s Ireland, as well as the fragility of Ireland’s position in the recently created international fora in Geneva.

⁵ The text from *Mr Gilhooley* cited in this panel read “She came towards him dancing, moving the folds of the veil so that they unfolded slowly as she danced”. In April 2019, sections of this panel were in exhibition at the Hugh Lane Gallery of Dublin.

In what came to be the first move to suppress artwork created to decorate the Centre William Rappard, Harry Clarke's *Geneva Window* never went to Geneva. As it is accounted for later in this article, a new gift from the Irish government would be offered to the authorities of the ILO in the 1960s. In the meantime, other governments were willing to leave an imprint on the organization's headquarters, and used diplomatic channels to form its hectic art collection in Geneva.

“He wishes that it be removed”: hiding the Spanish *Pygmalion*

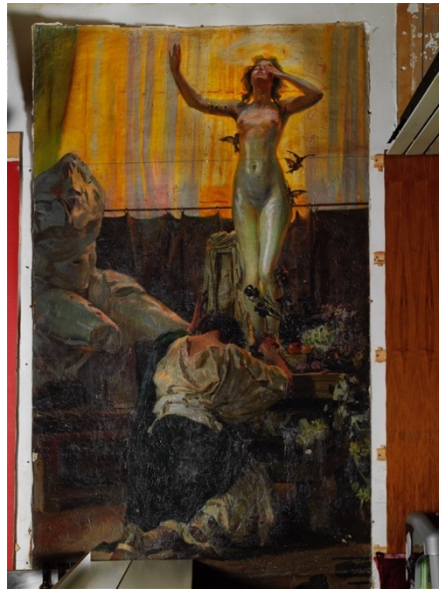


Figure 4: *Pygmalion* (1925), Eduardo Chicharro y Agüera (1873-1949), oil on canvas, 3.12 m high, 1.67 m wide.

A wonderfully naked woman awakens under floods of light from her revery of stone. Sometimes styled Galatea, she is the creation of the ancient legendary sculptor Pygmalion from Cyprus. He prostrates at her feet imploring to Aphrodite so that the statue becomes flesh and blood.⁶ Aphrodite's attendant Eros, in the form of birds, kisses the woman's body to awaken her. In contrast with the view of the gorgeous female figure, a mutilated sculpture of a colossal beheaded man silently defies the scene from the shadows.⁷ It is a stunning visual drama made of love, divine light and eroticism.

Chicharro's *Pygmalion* is one of the rare pictorial representations of the myth depicting the exact moment when the sculpture becomes human (Fig. 4). Most artistic renderings refer to the period before the mythical awakening, when she is still made of stone or wood, or after it when she is human. In several of the later versions, Pygmalion and Galatea are embracing and are sometimes

⁶ The sculptor at Galatea's feet may be seen as a female artist by some viewers.

⁷ It may be a likeness of the *Belvedere Torso*, a marble statue from the first century BC or AD in the Vatican Museum, which probably caught Chicharro's attention during his residence in Rome, 1912-1925. I thank Róisín Kennedy for this reference.

surrounded by children as in a familiar happy-ending narrative (in one black-humored version, Galatea finds out that Pygmalion has played this game many times and he enjoys thus plenty of other statue-lovers; she duly stabs him to death).

Madrid-born Eduardo Chicharro y Agüera, a graduate from the Spanish School of San Fernando, was a disciple of the master of light and skin, Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida. An outstanding portraitist—Alphonse XIII and the royal family were among his subjects—and landscape artist, Chicharro was influenced by Spanish Modernism. He was famous for his treatment of exotic subjects and his symbolist interest in light and color. Founder of the Spanish Association of Painters and Sculptors, Chicharro worked in Rome, where he was later appointed Director of the Royal Spanish Academy. It was in that city that he painted this version of *Pygmalion*. Later on, he returned to Spain where he received numerous awards, including gold medals for his famous paintings *Las uveras* and *Armida*. Among his followers were his son, the painter and poet Eduardo Chicharro Briones, and the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera.

Chicharro's painting was presented by the Spanish government to the ILO on 14 May 1925 to decorate their building. No records survived about its installation or where it was placed after the 1926 building opening. Ten years later, when the first annex was built on the lake-side area, *Pygmalion* was hung in the Correspondents Room (later renamed "Room Y"). But an outcry was raised against it.

Following the new annex completion, "the Director [Harold Butler] was startled with the view of the Spanish painting by Chicharro in the Correspondents Room. He wishes that it be removed and placed in a less visible location".⁸ Harold Butler's "wish" was fulfilled in a radical way. The architect and his team tried to remove the painting but the canvas would break, thus *Pygmalion* was covered with wood panels and hidden from view for at least seventy years.

What kind of art would provoke such a reaction from the ILO officers? Was it the nudity or the representation of the myth that offended their sense of morality? When the GATT secretariat moved into the Centre William Rappard in 1977, the Correspondents Room became a small cafeteria. Thirty years later, an ILO archivist reported the existence of photographs showing *Pygmalion* in this room. Since the painting was not relocated to the current ILO office, the archivist believed that it would still be concealed under the wooden panels.

It was a bright discovery on 27 April 2007, when a team of WTO workers removed the panels and uncovered *Pygmalion*. Some sections of the canvas were in a poor shape and the WTO commissioned Eric Favre-Bulle and his team of experts to restore it to its present condition.

Since then, no moves have been made to hide or remove *Pygmalion*. Still, assistants at the WTO conference service report that certain staff and delegates are intimidated by the massive presence of the naked woman in Room Y and prefer to book other rooms for their meetings.

⁸ Maurice Thudichum to George Épitaux, 25 September 1937 (ILO Historical Archives, Ref. M. 200/2/2/9), and Georges Épitaux to ILO administration, 4 October 1937 (ILO Historical Archives), my translation. Épitaux replied in French that the cost would be higher than the painting itself. On the margin, somebody (perhaps Butler) handwrote "That is certain".

At different times, in different places, art bewilders people and makes them uneasy. This is one of the few acid tests of a work of art. Art seldom pleases the public, at least at the time of its first exhibition. Art is provocative because it challenges our ethic or aesthetic ideas and opens our minds to new values and attitudes.

In search of Irish artistic neutrality



Figure 5: *Irish Industrial Development* (1961), Seán Keating (1889-1977), oil on wood panels, 3.58 m high, 6.25 m wide.

After the failure of the *Geneva Window* 1930, the ILO and the Irish government were busy with the many world conflicts and the brutal changes occurring in international relations. Almost three decades passed until a new project came to life to offer a gift to the ILO. Michael O’Callaghan, an Irish delegate to the ILO in 1957, is credited with the initiative to resurface the donation of a work of art for the Centre William Rappard. After a meeting held at the ILO on 9 June 1958, it was mentioned in the stiffly bureaucratic language of the *procès-verbal* that “O’Callaghan should be entrusted with any follow-up action which he may consider necessary in connection with the proposed Irish gift. Latest information would seem to indicate that work on the gift, which is to take the form of a mural painting to be placed on the wall opposite the ‘Dignity of Labour’ painting above the main staircase of the Office, is presently under way” (ILO Historical Archives, Internal Committee to Co-ordinate Gifts from Governments for the I.L.O. Building, ADM 102-1000, 9 June 1958).

A friend of Harry Clarke, Seán Keating of Limerick was known for his idealistic images of the West of Ireland, which would gradually evolve into allegorical and realistic representations of the landscape and people of that region. In 1959, Keating received the commission from the

Department of Industry and Commerce led by Jack Lynch.⁹ The mural was to be placed in Centre William Rappard's sweeping staircase, facing Maurice Denis's *The Dignity of Labour*. In May 1960, Keating travelled to Geneva to inspect the hanging space and returned again the next year to install the mural panels. The mural was officially unveiled on 19 June 1961 during the forty-fifth session of the International Labour Conference with the presence of Jack Lynch and other personalities (Fig. 5).

Owing in part to the negative experience with the *Geneva Window* thirty years before, any reference to fictional literature, religion and, especially, sex and drinking were banned from the themes depicted in *Irish Industrial Development*. Furthermore, there is a conspicuous absence of women among the represented subjects in contrast to Harry Clarke's imagery of "young and beautiful female figures often in compromising situations with their lovers" (Kennedy 2019: 86) in *Geneva Window*. It is as if the female visual contact could pollute the message conveyed by the artist and the officers in Dublin and Geneva who approved this piece. The neutrality sought by the artist was key in the conception of this piece. The mural offers a traditional view of Ireland and, at the same time, a positive perspective of its future development as an industrialized society, instead of its reputation as a backward agricultural country.

The elements included in the painting refer to various aspects of labor in Ireland. On the left, a group of four workers are manipulating electricity cables on what seems to be a reference to Keating's previous artistic work in the Ardnacrusha hydroelectric power station (the "Shannon Scheme"), which is an evocative and colorful record of the most significant industrial development of the early years in the history of the Irish Free State. In the foreground, a group of three scientists in white laboratory coats are working, according to art historian Éimear O'Connor, on a computer (personal correspondence, 8 July 2009). Digital computers have been developed in the United States since the 1940s. In 1955, the MIT's Whirlwind machine was the first digital computer with magnetic random access memory and in the UK, the EDSAC computer was the first stored programme electronic computer. The artist, who was aware of these developments through Irish and British newspapers, imagined what a computer would be and included it in the mural. This scene may be viewed as a farsighted vision of the country's economic development in the twenty-first century, especially taking into account that in the twenty-first century Ireland became one of the most important software exporters in the world.

In the centre of the mural, a construction worker is shown in front of what appears to be a red water tank with a tall grain storage tower in the background. The right-hand section of the mural shows a ship moored to a dock, a large crane, a car and a tractor. The ship in the dock to the right is a reference to Irish Shipping, a company established in March 1941 to ensure the supply of food and cargo during wartime. On the ship's hull the name *Arch* is visible, which may refer to the *Irish Larch* dry cargo vessel owned by Irish Shipping in 1956-1968.¹⁰ These objects are being observed by a tourist, which recalls this important industry in Ireland. Separated from the vessel by a grove of birch trees, a traditional village and a country road are the backdrop for a jockey on horseback flanked by cattle. This is a reference to Ireland's horse racing industry, in particular to the Irish

⁹ Cork-born John Mary (*Jack*) Lynch (1917-1999) served as Minister of Industry and Commerce in 1959-1965 and as Prime Minister (*Taoiseach*) of Ireland in 1977-1979.

¹⁰ Irish Shipping vessels were usually named after trees.

Hospitals' Sweepstake, which ran a lottery linked to major horse races.¹¹ On the left of the mural, shown under a construction ladder, the artist includes a portrait of himself looking directly at the viewer and a portrait of Jack Lynch looking upwards.¹²

With flamboyant flair, *Irish Industrial Development* presents a view of Ireland that is somehow different from the rural and maritime images distributed by promoters of tourism. A modernist and progress-oriented perspective is epitomized by the cheerful expression the young worker climbing the left-hand ladder and looking hopefully into the future.

Keating's *Irish Industrial Development* and Jorge Colaço's Portuguese blue tile panels *Fishing*, *Grape-picking* and *Agriculture* (1928) are some of the few works of art in the Centre William Rappard that have not suffered any censorship during almost a century of art suppression and rediscovery. Both represent labor and workers in an acceptable way for the political purposes of the elites in their time. Besides, they have not offended any feeling or beliefs from the viewers at the time of their inauguration or thereafter. Art speaks to very different publics during long periods of time. It also raises their concern about changing values and behaviors.

Representing Latin American diversity: the inauguration of the Brazil Room

Brazilian diplomacy plays a traditional, albeit unofficial, leading role in the international fora. Representing the largest and most powerful country in Latin America often means for Brazilian ambassadors that they have to harmonize strategies between the group of regional ambassadors. Graduates from Rio Branco Institute, the school of diplomacy in Brasilia, are among the best diplomats in the region and are very active in all countries promoting Brazil and Latin America.¹³ Thus, it is not surprising that the only Latin American art pieces in the Centre William Rappard came from Brazil and are those in the Brazil Room (Fig. 2).

When the north annex of the Centre William Rappard was built in 1937, the Brazilian government committed funds to acquire artwork, furniture and decorations for a meeting room in the Centre William Rappard. Also called "Room C", this charming space offers a view of Lake Geneva and the centenary trees in the William Rappard park, framed by the majestic view of the Alps. It was also one of the three committee rooms dedicated to the ILO constituencies: workers (Room A), governments (Room B) and employers (Room C).

¹¹ Winners were determined according to the results of various races, including the Derby, the Cambridgeshire and the Grand National. The "Sweep" in Ireland became an important source of financial revenue, providing funding to build many of the country's hospitals in 1930- 1986. A significant amount of the funding was raised from Irish immigrants in the United Kingdom and the United States, where lotteries were generally illegal.

¹² Art historian and Keating expert Éimear O'Connor does not think that this person is Jack Lynch (personal correspondence, 8 July 2009), contrary to the opinion of other scholars such as Joseph McBrinn and Róisín Kennedy.

¹³ In June 2007, with Claire Healy and others we organized the SILAS conference at NUI Galway and requested support from the Latin American embassies in Dublin and London. No reply came from the embassies except for Brazil. The second day of the conference ambassador Stelio Amarante, who came personally to listen to the papers, offered a generous serving of *salgados* made by a Brazilian cook living in Ireland. This gesture illustrates the proactive attitude of Brazilian diplomats.

However, the Brazilian offer ran into various problems that delayed the inauguration of the Brazil Room. Among the problems was the availability of leather for the walls. The original plan was to panel the walls with different kinds of Brazilian wood. Eventually, the material chosen was leather made from goat skin that is better sound isolation than wood. For these reasons, the decoration work was not completed until 1951.

The Brazilian coat of arms, placed above the main door to the room, was carved in wood following a mould obtained through the Brazilian consulate in Geneva. The ribbon underneath includes the country's official name, "United States of Brazil" (replaced in 1964 with the current name, "Federative Republic of Brazil"), and the date of the republic's proclamation on 15 November 1889.

The decorative map of Brazil hanging on the north wall of the room is made of glass ornamented with gold leaf. It was created by Jean Desnos (1910-1950), a designer of Art Deco furniture in Lyon. One of the peculiarities of the map is that Brasilia, the country capital, is not featured. The city was planned and developed only in 1956, and did not replace Rio de Janeiro as the capital of Brazil until 1960.

The furniture for the Brazil Room was supplied by the Brazilian employers' associations National Trade Confederation (CNC) and National Industry Confederation (CNI). It includes a remarkable oval table designed by the architect Georges Épitaux and made of Brazilian wood, and armchairs made of wood with leather dyed in the green color which is prominent in the Brazilian flag. Curtains in the same green were added to the decorations.

In 1975, the ILO moved to its current headquarters in Grand Saconnex, near the UN office at Palais des Nations in Geneva. The oval table and some of the furniture in the Brazil Room were taken to the new premises and never returned to its original setting. However, the map, the leather paneled walls and the coat of arms remained in the room.

During the renovation period of the Centre William Rappard that started in 2008, the Brazil Room was refurbished with new features. Since the original furniture could not be recovered, the Brazilian CNI stepped in and presented a replica of the oval table and the set of wooden chairs upholstered in green leather. On 9 September 2013, the renovated Brazil Room was inaugurated with the presence of WTO Director-General, Brazilian-born Roberto Azevêdo, the Foreign Minister of Brazil Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado and CNI Director of Industrial Development Carlos Eduardo Abijaodi.

Like Keating's and other artworks, the decorations in the Brazil Room have never suffered any suppression or destruction, other than the transfer of some of the original furniture to the ILO. During the nearly century-old history of the Centre William Rappard there have been alternate periods of censorship and rediscovery of the original works of art.

Art suppression and rediscovery

At different times, under different organizations and for different reasons, artwork in the Centre William Rappard has been covered, removed, relocated to remote places in the building and even destroyed. In other periods, some works of art were recovered and restored, and finally placed again in their original venue.

Apart from the *Geneva Window* and *Pygmalion* mentioned above, the dark claws of censorship closed on other important pieces. The ILO departed from the building in 1975. During the next two years the building was transformed and important renovations were accomplished. Among the new occupants arriving in 1977, the GATT secretariat moved into the north section.

The GATT has been signed in 1947 by 23 governments. It was a multilateral treaty, not an organization, and initially it lacked a secretariat. The International Trade Organization, proposed earlier in 1945 did not come into existence when the United States congress voted against it. For this reason, a reduced GATT secretariat managed international trade with support of the UN until the creation of the WTO in 1995. When in the 1960s the GATT secretariat increased its contracting parties and responsibilities, the Swiss government and the city of Geneva offered the north section of the Centre William Rappard to house the secretariat.

A priority of the GATT in that period was to build an identity for the secretariat. The new building presented a challenge since it has been associated for half a century with the ILO and labor issues (some in Geneva still know it as *L'édifice du BIT*, the ILO building). Therefore, every symbol of labor in the premises was regarded with suspicion.

Olivier Long, the Swiss diplomat who succeeded Eric Wyndham White as Director-General of the GATT secretariat requested the Swiss authorities that all works of art about labor in the Centre William Rappard should be removed. After some negotiation, Albert Hahn Jr.'s *Building the Future* in the main entrance hall and Gustave-Louis Jaulmes's murals *The Triumphant Peace* in the "Salle des Pas-perdus" were hidden under wooden panels and marble. In Room A, Dean Cornwell's colorful murals on labor were removed from the walls and deposited in the Gardeners' Villa. According to former GATT officers Peter Williams and Roslyn Jackson, the sole intention was to change the identity of the building from labor to trade.¹⁴ Otherwise, among ILO staff it was known that the politics of Cold War were the ultimate reason. The GATT officers were worried that images of labor in their new building would be interpreted as left-oriented sympathies within a conflict context between Western powers and socialist governments.

Roger Praplan, the architect responsible for the building renovation in 1975-1977, wrote that "during these renovations we undertook with full knowledge covering the artwork with wooden panels. For once, cultural imperatives eased the architect's work" (Roger Praplan to Joëlle Kuntz, 25 May 2008). I asked Mr. Praplan what he meant by "cultural imperatives" and he told me that

¹⁴ Williams and Jackson visited the renovation works at the Centre William Rappard before the GATT moved into the building. They opposed to the removal and covering of the works of art, and asked Deputy Director-General Gardner Patterson not to cover them but they were told that it was a decision already taken by Director-General Olivier Long. Personal interview with Peter Williams and Roslyn Jackson (8 April 2019).

“Olivier Long did not want to show profane, sentimentalist, almost human works of art in an office dedicated to trade”.¹⁵

The three works of art mentioned above were covered or removed in 1977 and almost forgotten thereafter. When I started working in the Centre William Rappard in 2001, nobody was aware of the artwork hidden under wooden panels. In 2007, thanks to the effort of the above-mentioned ILO archivist who was aware of the existence of these pieces, the WTO acceded to uncover the works of art. In this way, *Building the Future*, *The Triumphant Peace* and Cornwell murals on labor in Room A were recovered, restored and placed again in their original locations.

Cycles of art appreciation and suppression are a significant element in the history of the Centre William Rappard. Not surprisingly, owing to developments in social values sometimes exacerbated by the global media, these cycles continue up to the present. In 2019, the caricature painting *In GATT We Trust* by former GATT staff Claude Namy was removed from its location and sent to a deposit allegedly for the “offensive” and “problematic” roles of women included in the depicted scene, a meeting in the GATT secretariat in 1966.

Gift-giving, censorship, and cultural exclusivism are important aspects of international relations and diplomatic life. At times, they materialize in the decorations of international organization buildings, as it has happened repeatedly with the works of art at the Centre William Rappard. These factors are the result of actions by powerful players and, most frequently, of the social context encouraging or constraining decision-making in the international organizations.

Three further questions

Why do governments offer works of art? The reasons for governments and institutions to present gifts and the nature of those gifts are closely linked to the ideological, political and cultural thinking prevalent at the time the donation is made. In the Centre William Rappard, some gifts have been the result of opposing views.

The magnificent *Dignity of Labour* by Maurice Denis on the left side of the main staircase was a gift of the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (ICTU) in 1931. This donation was made in reaction to Albert Hahn Jr.’s ceramic Delft panel *Building the Future* in the entrance hall, a gift of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU, also known as the Amsterdam International or Yellow International) in 1926. What prompted the Christian unionists to commission their mural was the absence of explicit religious symbols in *Building the Future*. The dialogue between these two works of art reflects the debates at that time between the materialist view of the labor movement and the social values promulgated by the Christian churches, which were very active in the first decades of the ILO.

Gifts are a key element of the protocol. Following diplomatic etiquette, an official visitor who is scheduled to meet the organization’s officers customarily presents a gift. Most of the times, gifts are handcraft made by local artisans in the visitor’s country, such as tapestry, ceramic vases and

¹⁵ Personal interview with Roger Praplan (31 July 2019), my translation.

dishes, boxes and containers, jewelry or replicas of boats, carriages and animals. With a gesture of mutual respect, hosts offer the visitor an object that is representative of the organization.

Gift-giving follows the principle of reciprocity in that the real and perceived value of the gift cannot be so high that it would be difficult or impossible to return the favor in kind. This situation would be embarrassing for the donor and the receiver. That is why the nature of some gifts is consulted before the meeting. Presents foster good relationships and place the other party in a good-will debt.¹⁶

One reason to present elaborated artwork is that it ensures somehow its long-term exhibition, thus symbolizing the durable relationship between the giving and receiving parties. However, in an nearly century-old building events such as the change of occupant institutions make the artwork meaningless or even detrimental to the new organizations. The works of art are thus in peril.

Is this really art? One common circumstance of all occurrences of art suppression in the history of the Centre William Rappard is that those performing or demanding censorship in any form customarily aim to denigrate the work of art or the artist.¹⁷ They cite the supposedly poor qualities of the piece or simply declare that they do not like it. They speak about the immorality of the represented subjects or their inconvenience or controversial performance regarding the international organizations housed in the building. Also, they deny the public character of the work of art as if it was exhibited in a private venue and not in a building owned and used by governments and public bodies.

Only the artist may value his or her creation as a work of art. Critics, experts or the public are on the side of the reception and appreciate it positively or negatively, but they should not declare if a piece is art or not. There are a number of indicators that help to identify a work of art:

- Uselessness. Art has no aim or benefit in itself. The artwork is created for nothing. Following Kantian aesthetics, art is free from any interest (architecture, decoration or cuisine may be considered as counterexamples).
- Meaningfulness. Art must convey a message, a feeling or an emotion. Leon Tolstoy wrote about the “infectiousness” as the capacity of the artwork to unite artist and receiver through an emotion.
- Uniqueness. The work of art is the only one of its kind (this has been relativized with the massive repetition of the online media).
- Representativeness. Art follows nature, it is necessarily idealistic (even the most abstract painting represents something in some way).
- Historicity. Reception is ever-changing with new readings and responses. Art is “without an end” (Kant) and “universal” (Tolstoy). Art is not created in a vacuum, and its nature and concepts change with time and space.
- Intentionality. The artist does feel the emotions he or she conveys (“design” according to Kant, “sincerity” to Tolstoy).

¹⁶ French President François Hollande’s visit to Timbuktu, Mali, in February 2013 provides an illustration of the complexities of gift-giving. A live camel for a French zoo was offered to the President by the local authorities. But the enterprise presented many bureaucratic issues and the camelid was left with a Malian family without clear instructions. To much scandal, it transpired that the poor animal ended its days in a warm *tajine*.

¹⁷ Indeed, those undertaking censorship seldom call their deeds “censorship”.

- *Ars celare artem*, it is art to conceal art. This phrase by the Roman poet Albius Tibullus (54-19 a.C.), wrongly attributed to Ovid, means that real art gives no weight to the medium or the techniques used in its creation.

Furthermore, Walter Benjamin argued that “works of art are received and valued on different planes. Two polar types stand out; with one, the accent is on the cult value; with the other, on the exhibition value of the work. Artistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult” (1969: 7). Most of the times, when a work of art is under the threat of censorship its cult value is predominant over its exhibition value. This leads to the third conclusion, a certain “cult value” prevalent in Irish Studies and other field disciplines.

Is Irish Diaspora Studies a cult? As advanced in the first note of this article, I made an odd selection of artwork in Geneva’s historic Centre William Rappard. I adapted my choice of Irish, Spanish and Brazilian works to the field of “Irish-Latin American studies”, which reduces the narrative to a limited and somehow myopic horizon.¹⁸ Indeed, a variety of international organizations, governments and institutional players share the artistic, architectural and decorative history of this building, and they should be taken into account to write a complete history. In other words, I followed here the cultural exclusivism of many in Irish Diaspora Studies who focus on everything Irish while neglecting a large part of anything else.

I tried to be as impartial as possible, but this article is a metaphor of the above-mentioned values. Art commission, creation, hiding, destruction, recovery and restoration are the result of decisions taken at different times by different persons in various entities, and are linked to complex political reasons. Considering the body of artwork in the Centre William Rappard within the framework of international relations in Geneva should be the object of a broader study, to which I hope to have contributed.

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¹⁸ I resisted the temptation, so frequent among scholars in Irish Diaspora Studies, to search Irish links among the artists of other pieces in the Centre William Rappard. It is clear to me now that there is little scholarly value in researching remote family connections just to establish that someone had an Irish ancestor (except to falsely imply that those connections are the source of his or her contribution). One recurrent example is Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s remote Irish links, which had no impact whatsoever in his ideas and actions.

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