

Edmundo Murray

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Art Discovery and  
Censorship in the  
Centre William  
Rappard of Geneva

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Building the Future

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47 Edmundo Murray  
Independent Scholar  
Granada, Spain

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|   |    |
|---|----|
| <i>To the invisible hands that every day clean the bathrooms, the floors, the</i> | 70 |
| <i>corridors, the large meeting rooms, desks, furniture and windows in the</i>    | 71 |
| <i>building. Our eyes met sometimes, late in the evening, when I was going</i>    | 72 |
| <i>home, you always working off-hours. Your busy Bonsoir in thick Portuguese,</i> | 73 |
| <i>Albanian and other accents speaking of hard times, homesickness and</i>        | 74 |
| <i>weariness. You are so important!</i>   | 75 |
| <i>This book is dedicated to you, the cleaning staff of the Centre William</i>    | 76 |
| <i>Rappard.</i>   | 77 |

This book is an account of art reception in the offices and conference rooms of a unique building in Geneva over almost a century. Inaugurated in 1926, the Centre William Rappard is the first building in Geneva designed to house an international organization.

A building is not just stones, steel, glass and mortar. This building, the Centre William Rappard, is at the crossroads of people coming from all corners of the world, from all walks of life. Within these walls, thousands have shared their genius and vanity, passions and tastes, brilliance and anxieties. So many people have worked here—for the International Labour Office, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Trade Organization. And there have been plenty of visitors, technicians, experts, diplomats, vendors, janitors and guards.

Together they are a family, born when the building was inaugurated with great pomp, emerging from the ashes of World War I. Over the course of 96 years, as in every family, there have been many changes; there has been conflict and deep affection. Entire organizations came in and went out. People left their long-lasting mark in every corner of the building. It is a place peopled by ghosts, some of them anonymous and humble, others glamorous characters looking for prominent roles in this story. Stubbornly, all these ghosts continue building the future, like the construction worker in red depicted in the great ceramic panel of the vestibule, surrounded by promises of peace and justice.

This is a book about the artwork and decorations in the Centre William Rappard, a place where I had a personal involvement. I worked in this

105 building for almost twenty years. From the beginning, I was intrigued by  
106 its architecture, the stern decorations, the imposing works of art and the  
107 grandiose setting on the shores of lake Léman, with a privileged view  
108 towards Mont Blanc and the Alps. I researched its history, why it was built  
109 here, the selection of materials and decorative elements, the successive  
110 expansions and the evocative stories behind the artworks. These pieces  
111 represent a hectic collection of artists, styles, materials and, more than  
112 anything else, messages addressed to us, the viewers.

113 I was amazed to learn how often these works had been acquired or  
114 received as gifts, some of them later covered, removed or destroyed, and  
115 then re-discovered (often serendipitously), restored and exhibited again.  
116 The waves of promotion and suppression of works of art can only be  
117 explained by the continuously changing values and behaviours in our  
118 global societies and by the reflection of those changes in the institutional  
119 strategies and the people working in this building. Over the decades,  
120 diplomacy and aesthetic insight joined forces and resulted in either greater  
121 appreciation or, sometimes, a marked dislike for the works of art.

122 Humans are the only beings capable of perceiving art. In the aesthetic  
123 experience, our extraordinary capacity to symbolize is put to work at its  
124 highest levels. We represent, yet we are often afraid of our representations.  
125 We remove the artwork. We destroy it. My experience working in the  
126 Centre William Rappard has been a unique opportunity to learn how our  
127 ethical and aesthetic prejudices can be overturned by certain works of art,  
128 not all of them necessarily prominent or well-known, within the diplo-  
129 matic environment of an international organization. I am grateful for this  
130 opportunity.

131 I believe that reflection on art—the essence of art, what is art and what  
132 is not—is a necessary first step to understanding the paradox of art: love  
133 and fear of the image. I introduce this book with an opening chapter  
134 including the context of art reception in diplomatic circles in twentieth-  
135 century Geneva. The subsequent chapters are arranged chronologically,  
136 starting from the opening of the building in 1926 to the latest instance of  
137 art removal in 2019. Various cases of art acquisition and promotion are  
138 discussed, as well as instances in which pieces were hidden, removed or  
139 destroyed. The closing chapter includes some afterthoughts on art and  
140 diplomacy, and my experience studying the artistic gifts that are a key  
141 source of the building's heritage.

142 Parts of this book have been adapted from some of my previous publi-  
143 cations. Among them are *Centre William Rappard: Home of the World*

*Trade Organization, Geneva* (2011), co-authored with Joëlle Kuntz, and *The WTO Building: Art and architecture at the Centre William Rappard* (WTO, 2015), on which I worked with Jaci Eisenberg. I also adapted materials from previous journal articles focusing on various aspects of the building and its works of art, including those in *Gaceta de Bellas Artes* (AEPE, June 2021) and *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* (SILAS, 2020). Finally, I drew upon the virtual tour that we published with Antony Martin in 2018 on the website of the World Trade Organization ([www.wto.org/vt](http://www.wto.org/vt)).

I am thankful to so many people who, knowingly or not, greatly contributed to this work. They are generous colleagues and specialists from whom I learned a myriad of details about the building, its art history, the various actors in the international organizations, and the diplomacy of gift-giving. They are also passionate professionals in international relations, historians, publishers, scholars, librarians and others with whom I had the privilege to work and also to discuss (and occasionally, disagree with on) aspects of art in international organizations. I was able to learn from their knowledge and wholehearted enthusiasm and I am deeply obliged to all of them, including María Dolores Barreda Pérez, Remo Becci, Josep Bonet, Karl Brauner, Maria Bressi, Bernard Delpal, Pierre-Yves Dhinaut, Victor Do Prado, Jaci Eisenberg, Jesús Galán Sanchez, Dario Gamboni, Laura Gomez Bustos, Michelle Healy, Róisín Kennedy, Sandrine Kott, Bob Luther, Serge Marin-Pache, Anthony Martin, Ravindranath Morarjee, Clarisse Morgan, Jean-Claude Pallas, Nthisana Phillips, Jukka Piitulainen, Dominique Plaza, Richard Pollock, Paul Rolian, Helen Swain, Hetty M. van der Meij, José Francisco Zúñiga García, and many others who are not mentioned here. With particular recognition, I thank Fiona Rolian for reading the first manuscript and providing useful comments and corrections. Without her, this book and the story of the building would be incomplete. I am also grateful to many colleagues and friends who volunteered over all these years to guide tours of the building and to share their own views with hundreds of visitors. During my research, I had the exclusive opportunity to interview some witnesses of important art reception periods in the building, which are accounted for in Chaps. 5 and 7: I particularly thank Richard Blackhurst, Roslyn Jackson, Estela Jaillat, Christian Namy, Roger Praplan, Valerie Simpson and Peter Williams for providing their vital insights. I thank the manuscript readers for their generous and honest feedback and thoughtful comments. I am grateful to Ginevra House for her editorial input of the

185 highest quality, and to Camille Davies and her colleagues at Palgrave  
186 Macmillan for their great support.

187 Finally, I wish to thank, rather symbolically, the artists through their  
188 characters appearing in the works of art at the Centre William Rappard.  
189 After so much time observing and studying these men, women and chil-  
190 dren, their physiognomies, positions and attitudes, an intimacy was cre-  
191 ated with them. I learned to appreciate their role in that marvellous instant  
192 when an artwork impacts the viewer. For this reason, I have interspersed  
193 in italics some of their fictitious thoughts and feelings in italics in the fol-  
194 lowing text. I imagined the emotions of these personages and shared these  
195 musings with you to better understand our relation to the artworks in the  
196 Centre William Rappard.

197 On the base of Gilbert Bayes's *Blue Robed Bambino* (1926), a graceful  
198 fountain sculpture that is now located on the lakeside terrace of the Centre  
199 William Rappard, an inscription reads: "O stream of life run you slow or  
200 fast / All streams come to the sea at last". Like the flow of rivers, I wish to  
201 advance and, at the same time, I yearn to come back. The joyful yet wistful  
202 feeling of homecoming: a return to familiar places, smells, motions.  
203 Everything is the same and everything is changed. The returned traveller  
204 looking into his parent's eyes after years of absence. The intense colours of  
205 the fruit and the glistening water pitcher in the old still-life painting. The  
206 visit to the cemetery. Yet, I know I am involved in this steady flow of  
207 becoming, and wish to share with you these lights and shadows within the  
208 walls of the place I learned to love, the Centre William Rappard.

209 In the wave-rocking language of Cape Verdean music, *si ka badu, ka ta*  
210 *biradu* (Eugenio Tavares, 1932). If you don't go, you cannot come back.

211 It's time to go.

212 Granada, Spain  
213 29 November 2022

Edmundo Murray

- 1784—The lakeside villa and property in Sécheron, Geneva, is bought by the Count de la Rochefoucauld. Previous owners were François Menet and Jean-Louis Odier. 215  
216  
217
- 1785—Construction of adjacent Villa Rappard, renovated in 1894. 218
- 1916—Villa Rochefoucauld acquired by Jules Edmond Bloch from the Montesquiou-Fezensac family. 219  
220
- 1919—Treaty of Versailles: creation of the League of Nations and the ILO. 221  
222
- 1923—Switzerland transfers the Villa Bloch to the League. Swiss architect George Epitau selected to design new Headquarters for the ILO. 223  
224
- 1926—Inauguration of the ILO building. Installation of works of art and decorations. 225  
226
- 1930—Jorge Colaço's tiled panels donated by Portugal. 227
- 1931—Harry Clarke dies in Switzerland. Exhibition of his *Geneva Window* rejected by Irish government. 228  
229
- 1932—*The Dignity of Labour* by Maurice Denis installed in the lateral staircase. 230  
231
- 1937—New wings designed by Epitau: northeast and southwest. Eduardo Chicharro's *Pygmalion* placed in the Correspondents Room and later covered. 232  
233  
234
- 1938—Renovation of Room W. 235
- 1940—Gustave-Louis Jaulmes's *The Triumphant Peace* murals installed in Salle des Pas-Perdus. Temporary closing of the Centre William Rappard until end of World War II. 236  
237  
238



- 240 • 1946—Property of the building transferred from League of  
241 Nations to ILO.
- 242 • 1947—Establishment of the GATT as a result of the Bretton Woods  
243 Conference.
- 244 • 1951—South wing built.
- 245 • 1955—Dean Cornwell’s murals installed in Room A.
- 246 • 1957—Villa Bloch demolished to build southwest wing, which closes  
247 the south section of the historic building.
- 248 • 1961—Jaulmes’s *The Triumphant Peace* murals covered by ILO. Seán  
249 Keating’s *Irish Industrial Development* installed in the lateral staircase,  
250 opposite Denis’s *The Dignity of Labour*.
- 251 • 1963—Villa Rappard acquired by the ILO.
- 252 • 1966—Public lakeside promenade inaugurated by the city of Geneva.
- 253 • 1975—ILO moves to Morillons headquarters. Original works of art  
254 relocated to the ILO new building. Property of the building transferred  
255 back to Switzerland.
- 256 • 1976—Building renovation. Hahn Jr’s *Building the Future*, Jaulmes’s  
257 *The Triumphant Peace* and Chicharro’s *Pygmalion* uncovered by FIPOI  
258 and covered by GATT in 1977. Cornwell murals in Room A removed.
- 259 • 1977—GATT Secretariat, UN High Commissioner for Refugees and  
260 the library of the Graduate Institute move into the building, renamed  
261 Centre William Rappard.
- 262 • 1995—WTO becomes the successor to the GATT and main occupant  
263 of the building.
- 264 • 1998—Construction of the new Council Room “William Rappard”  
265 (CR Room) adjacent to the building.
- 266 • 2007—Hidden artwork rediscovered, including Hahn Jr’s *Building the*  
267 *Future*, Jaulmes’s *The Triumphant Peace* murals, Cornwell’s murals on  
268 labour, and Chicharro’s *Pygmalion*.
- 269 • 2009—Geneva approves by referendum a major expansion, renova-  
270 tions and improvements to the building. Jens Wittfoht studio selected  
271 as architects for the south annex.
- 272 • 2012—Northern courtyard becomes the Atrium. Switzerland transfers  
273 the lease of the building to the WTO (except CR Room and  
274 Villa Rappard).
- 275 • 2013—New south annex erected. Renovation of the historic building,  
276 construction of security perimeter. Opening of Gusu Garden.

- 2014—Inauguration of the lakeside terrace and the relocated *Blue Robed Bambino* fountain sculpture by Gilbert Bayes, previously installed in the Atrium. Construction of the Welcome Pavilion. 278  
279  
280
- 2017—Restored chandeliers in the library, offered by the Czech Republic. 281  
282
- 2019—Removal of Claude Namy's *In GATT We Trust*. 283
- 2020—Constantin Meunier's bronze *The Bricklayers* returned to the building. Cleaning and restoration of *The Dignity of Labour, Peace and Justice*, and *Grape Picking*. 284  
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