

**CENTRE
WILLIAM
RAPPARD**

CENTRE WILLIAM RAPPARD

Home of the World Trade Organization
Geneva

THIS BOOK ON THE HISTORY AND WORKS OF ART of the Centre William Rappard would not have been possible ten years ago. The reason for this is simple: despite the building's rich past, illustrious occupants and proud appearance, it was a little antiquated and not particularly well known or even well liked. Located in a magnificent park on the shore of Lake Geneva, with a spectacular view of the Alps, it has a somewhat turbulent past.

AS THE FIRST BUILDING IN GENEVA built to house an international organization, the Centre William Rappard, named after a leading Swiss diplomat, was originally the headquarters of the International Labour Office (ILO). The ILO left the building in 1940 during the Second World War, but later moved back in 1948, only to leave for good in 1975 when the Centre William Rappard was handed over to its new occupants, namely the GATT, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the library of the Graduate Institute of International Studies of Geneva. In 1995, when the WTO was established and decided, after some hesitation, to keep its headquarters in Geneva, the building became the subject of delicate negotiations between the Swiss Confederation and senior officials of this new international organization. All these comings and goings left their mark, and in 2005 began the lengthy task of restoring not only the building's structure, but also its image and identity.

TODAY THE WTO IS VERY MUCH ATTACHED to the Centre William Rappard and considers it to be of symbolic importance. The building is moving with the times, thanks to large-scale renovation and extension work, and yet the Organization also cherishes the building's past, which can be seen in its architecture, decorative features and numerous works of art. The WTO itself began "discovering" these works of art in 2007, in what was, to all intents and purposes, a real-life treasure hunt. A number

of the works, donated by countries and labour unions during the ILO era, had been either concealed or removed. In restoring these works, the WTO took on an identity that was not strictly speaking its own, but of which its staff and Members have become proud.



THE WORKS OF ART PRESENTED IN THIS BOOK, many of which have been given a new lease of life by the WTO, display a wide variety of styles and techniques. Many of them represent labour in its various forms – an allusion, of course, to the activities of the ILO, the building's original occupant. Other works, such as Eduardo Chicharro's "Pygmalion", are more unusual. With no apparent link to the world of labour or international organizations, Chicharro's work could be viewed as an allegory of the international community praying that its long-standing efforts to achieve peace and cooperation might become reality.

CONTINUITY AND COHERENCE ARE THE TWO WORDS that give the Centre William Rappard and its works of art their full historical and political meaning. Created at a time when cooperation between nations was more of a dream than reality, the building is now the headquarters of an institution that regulates global trade, in a city that has become a centre of international governance. The message it conveys, with all these different occupants and numerous changes is a call for a greater coherence and coordination between all international organizations. The Centre William Rappard demonstrates the continued resolve of nations to cooperate in building a better and fairer world.

Pascal Lamy
Director-General

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Edmundo Murray

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THIS BOOK TELLS THE STORY OF A BUILDING that has been the home to international organizations since 1926. Over the past 85 years, the Centre William Rappard has seen the establishment of some of the first international organizations, such as the International Labour Office (ILO) and the League of Nations, and has witnessed an evolution in international relations from introspection to the globalized society that we live in today.

BUILT IN 1926, the Centre William Rappard has housed at different times the ILO, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the library of the Graduate Institute of International Studies, the Secretariat of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and since 1995, the World Trade Organization. All of these occupants have shared the goal of striving for a better life for people across the world, defending basic rights and aiming to make the world a more equal, safe and prosperous place.

A FUNDAMENTAL FACT about the Centre William Rappard is that it was designed for daily activity and is, above all, a workplace occupied by diplomats from around the world, international civil servants and local staff. The works of art presented in this book hint at the activities of the building's occupants over the years and the passions of the member states that have generously donated its artistic wealth. Although very different in style, each work of art sends a message about society and the transfiguring power of art. As this book recounts, this latter quality has not always been fully understood by the building's occupants, leading to the temporary removal of certain works of art over the years. Since the occupants have changed many times, this is perhaps not so surprising as tastes change and the enthusiasm for the symbolism of certain artworks wanes.

THIS BOOK BEGINS with an account of how the building was conceived, and how it has evolved during periods of conflict as well as peacetime. Over this time, it has become a cornerstone of the international development of Geneva, a city that has never shied away from asserting its independence and defending its values.

THE BOOK TRACES THE STORIES of the diverse range of international civil servants who have made a significant contribution to the evolution of the building, achieving fame by dedicating their lives to the aspirations of the organization that employed them, or by being inspired by their surroundings to achieve artistic heights of their own.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL ARTWORKS that decorate the building provides an insight into the changing cultural and social preoccupations of those inhabiting the building. From workers' rights to the need for a better and more equal world, the major themes of the collection are conveyed in a multitude of ways, combining naturalistic detail with artistic whimsy. The result is an artistic legacy that continues to breathe life into the daily activities of this much-loved building. ■

◀ Main entrance to the Centre William Rappard. The door was donated by the Government of Australia and was made by Maison Held of Montreux, Switzerland, with Australian black bean wood.