Militant Switzerland vs. Switzerland, Island of Peace

Two Monuments, Two Conceptions

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Militant Switzerland
vs. Switzerland, Island of Peace
Two Monuments, Two Conceptions

by Alex Winiger

Two monumental murals depict Switzerland during the First World War: the votive painting in the Lower Ranft Chapel in Flüeli-Ranft by Robert Durrer (1867-1934), Albert Hinter (1876-1957) and Hans von Matt (1899-1985) from 1920-21, and the cycle of Charles L'Eplattenier (1874-1946) in the Knights' Hall of the Colombier Castle from 1915-19, depicting the mobilization of Swiss soldiers in 1914.[1] They report in rich details how differently artists in that country saw the war of 1914-18. Both were put into architectural monuments built around 1500.[2] However, they differ greatly in their

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[1] For L'Eplattenier's works at Colombier Castle, see Sylvie Pipoz-Perroset, *Les décorations murales de Charles L'Eplattenier au château de Colombier* (1916-1949): pour une approche de la peinture en milieu militaire, mémoire de licence (chez l'auteur 2002); id., Les décorations de Charles L'Eplattenier Colombier Castle, in: *Kunst und Architektur in der Schweiz* 2004.1, "Patriotische Wandmalerei im 20. Jahrhundert" 14-21; Anouk Hellmann, *Charles L'Eplattenier 1874-1946* (Hauterive, 2011). On Durrer's restoration and reconstruction of the Ranft complex and his mural: Robert Durrer, *Die Kunstdenkmäler des Kantons Unterwalden*, *Zürich 1899-1928*; Jakob Wyrsch, *Robert Durrer* (Stans, 1944); Philipp Sarasin, *Robert Durrer* (Stans 1867-1934 Stans). Niklaus von Flüe rettet die Schweiz vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Votivbild-Entwurf von 1920 für das in dieser *Weise ausgeführte Fresko in der unteren Ranftkapelle* (Kt. Nidwalden, 1921), in: *Die Erfindung der Schweiz. Bildentwürfe einer Nation 1848-1998* (Zürich 1998), 391-394; Christoph Mörgeli, Totentanz und heile Schweiz. Ein monumentales Fresko von 1921 im Flühli-Ranft, in: *L'Art macabre* 7, *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Totentanz-Vereinigung* (Düsseldorf 2006), 107-122; Guy P. Marchal, *Schweizer Gebrauchsgeschichte"* Geschichtsbilder, Mythenbildung und nationale Identität, 2nd ed. 2007, 445-462; Regula Odermatt-Bürgi, "Unser liebes Vaterland, wunderbar behütet und verschont." Robert Durrer und das Votivbild im Ranft, in: *Nidwalden im Ersten Weltkrieg* (= Beiträge zur Geschichte Nidwaldens 48) (Stans, 2018), 156-173.

[2] On Colombier Castle, see Maurice Jeanneret, *Le château de Colombier*. Son histoire, ses embellissements, Neuchâtel 1954. The construction history of the Lower Ranftkapelle in Sachseln is investigated in Durrer, *Kunstdenkmäler*, 291-297.

form, fulfilling a completely different function at the time of their execution.

The war triggered a flood of monuments after 1918. An estimate names 180,000 war memorials built in France alone.[3] Many of these confined themselves to simple pictorial elements such as the triumphal arch, an obelisk or the sculpture of a (male) hero, even though the medium of the fresco was predestined for this task: through the commitment to a "public benefit";[4] a nationalist impetus; the idea of the "readable image" (analogous to the "*biblia pauperum*," the "bible of the poor"); finally, the offer of collective self-assurance.

The works in Colombier and Flüeli-Ranft presented below are monuments in Switzerland, a country that escaped the war. For that reason, I add two works from England and France which necessarily illuminate aspects stemming from the actual experience of the war.

Mentioning three Swiss works of the "Landi 39" period may

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[3] Leonard V. Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, *France and the Great War 1914-1918* (Cambridge 2003), 166.

[4] "Public benefit" was a criterion used in the context of increased public art funding in the USA. See Meyer Schapiro, *The Public Use of Art* (New York, 1936), 4-6. The idea ultimately goes back to the French Revolution: "The arts will regain their full dignity [. . .]. Canvas, marble, and bronze will compete in the future with the desire to convey to posterity the unwavering courage of our republican phalanx." Jacques-Louis David in front of the National Convention, 1794, cited from: Oskar Bätschmann, *Ausstellungskünstler. Kult und Karriere im modernen Kunstsystem* (Cologne, 1997), 73.

Charles L'Eplattenier, Le serment / L'installation défensive, 1915–19, Columbier
Source: République et Canton de Neuchâtel, Office du patrimoine et de l'archéologie, Section Con-

finally help to distinguish L'Eplattenier's and Durrer's representations from the Swiss mainstream of "*Geistige Landesverteidigung*" (spiritual national defense) practiced in Switzerland) of the 1930s and 1940s.[5]

Fervor Against Distance

Charles L'Eplattenier, Mobilization cycle, 1915-19, Knights' Hall in Colombier Castle, Millevigne NE. Oil on marouflaged canvas, approx. 4 x 23 m.

Charles L'Eplattenier's paintings in the upper one of two halls in the old part of Colombier Castle[6] show an oath scene and the occu-

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[5] The cultural movement of "Spiritual National Defense" in Switzerland has its roots in the beginning of the 1930s. Federal Councillor Philipp Etter (1891-1977) started it officially with his statement published on December 9, 1938. Its aim was the strengthening of values and customs perceived to be 'Swiss' and thus create a defence against Naziism and Fascism, later also against Communism. The National Exposition of 1939 in Zurich was very much a consequence of this policy, which even led to the expression of a "Landi"-style (in architecture, in the arts, and other cultural areas). In a broadcast statement in the 1960s, Armin Meili (1891-1982, former director of the "Landi 39") mentioned that General Henri Guisan (1874-1960, commander in chief of the Swiss army during the Second World War) told him: "Your Landi replaces me a whole army corps."

[6] The older parts of the castle were built in the sixteenth century and used as a noble residence. Around 1800, the castle initially served as a hospital, from the 1830s as a military caserne. The present troop dwellings and the arsenal were built in the nineteenth century, in the style of the former castle. During the war period, the oldest parts of the building complex used to house commander offices and a wardroom.

Castle (knights' hall), Millevigne NE. Photograph by Marc Renaud, Saint-Blaise, 2012.
 servation du patrimoine.

Charles L'Eplattenier, La montée à la frontière (photomontage) 1915- Saint-Blaise, 2012. Source: République et Canton de Neuchâtel, Office du patrimoine et de

pation of the northwestern Swiss border with France near Lucelle (today belonging to the canton of Jura) by units of the Swiss army in 1914 and 1915. The portrayed soldiers seem to correspond to members of the 8th Infantry Regiment stationed in Colombier in 1919.[7] At the time, Ferdinand-Robert-Treytorrens de Loys (1857-1917) was commander of the second division of the Swiss Army and of the caserne. De Loys had spotted L'Eplattenier drawing his comrades during the first months of the war in Saint-Maurice (Valais), where L'Eplattenier had started his service as a fortress cannoneer. The artist was therefore asked to accompany the commander and to accept a commission sponsored privately by the same.

L'Eplattenier, a graduate in Budapest and Paris, and professor and head of the Ecole d'art in La Chaux-de-Fonds from 1897 to 1912, had already some experience in the monumental decoration of buildings. Among them was a cycle on "War and Peace," which he created between 1896 and 1902 along with William Victor Aubert (1856-1942) for the La Chaux-de-Fonds marksmen's clubhouse. His largest work, realized before the First World War and still his most famous one to-

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[7] See Pipoz-Perroset (2004), 16.

19, Colombier Castle (knights' hall), Millevigne NE. Photograph by Marc Renaud, l'archéologie, Section Conservation du patrimoine.

day, is the interior design of the crematory of La Chaux-de-Fonds, built from 1909 to 1912, which he executed together with his student Jean-André Evard (1876-1972).[8] For the Mobilization cycle in Colombier Castle, L'Eplattenier drew up over 400 studies. Authorized by de Loys,' he was able to observe and sketch the mobilization taking place in Delémont and Lucelle. He completed the paintings in 1919 which were stored until being marouflaged to the walls of the "Salle des Chevaliers" in 1925.[9]

The titles of the individual sections are "Le serment" ("The Flag Oath"), "La chevauchée" ("The Cavalry Deployment"), "La montée à la frontière" ("Climbing to the Border") and "Installation défensive" ("Border Fortification"). The paintings surround the room, interrupted only by doors, windows and a large fireplace. They form a kind

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[8] See Hellmann (2011), 31.

[9] *Marouflage* means sticking canvases to a rigid support. Building decorations in the nineteenth century were usually realized using this technique. The paintings could be executed in the studio, then exhibited and finally installed at their destination. See Thérèse Burollet, Frank Folliot, Daniel Imbert, *Le triomphe des mairies. Grands décors républicains à Paris 1870-1914* (Paris, 1986), 56, *et al.*; *Ausstellungskünstler. Kult und Karriere im modernen Kunstsystem* (Cologne, 1997); Romy Golan, *Muralnomad: the paradox of wall painting, Europe 1927-1957* (New Haven, 2009).

Charles L'Eplattenier, L'installation défensive (detail), 1915-19, Colombier Castle (knights' hall), Millevigne NE. Photograph by Marc Renaud, Saint-Blaise, 2012. Source: République et Canton de Neuchâtel, Office du patrimoine et de l'archéologie, Section Conservation du patrimoine.

of seamlessly inserted tapestry that dominates the hall and expands into a landscape perspective.

The endless, rigid ranks of soldiers of the oath scene are looking into the room towards the observer, flanked on the right by the horsemen around the commander (presumably a portrait of Treytorrens de Loys). From this wall, the movement across the window wall and the wall opposite the muster flows steadily to the left, an endless stream of cavalry, guns and marching soldiers circling the viewer. The inner front wall of the hall marks a turning point: soldiers "attack" the Jura rocks in a countermove, crossing the main entrance door, while a guard over the landing, facing away from the observer and the figures of the oath scene, overlooks the area beyond the rocks, i.e. the border.

The hall can be seen as portraying Switzerland itself. The viewer would then be its inhabitant. The muster is for him: come along, defend your country. Military formations deploy around him, while others, entrenching themselves in the rocks, turn to the menace that comes from outside.

The paintings express the faith in the feasible: the militant Swiss close their ranks and prepare for the imminent danger by harnessing all their strength. The danger has not yet passed, and the men have to ward it off alone. The prerequisites for this are the tight, military order and the oath of allegiance. The paintings do not show the war activities themselves. They portray the real effort that the defense of the country implies: men are digging trenches.

Charles L'Eplattenier, L'installation défensive (detail), 1915-19, Colombier Castle (knights' hall), Millevigne NE. Photograph by Marc Renaud, Saint-Blaise, 2012. Source: République et Canton de Neuchâtel, Office du patrimoine et de l'archéologie, Section Conservation du patrimoine.

The cycle at Colombier Castle, to which L'Eplattenier added a second one 20 years later called "La Fondation de la Suisse" (The foundation of Switzerland)[10], historically and stylistically stands exactly between Ferdinand Hodler's Marignano triptych of 1900 and the many patriotic representations in the gravitational field of the Swiss National Exhibition in 1939 ("Landi 39").

Hodler's painting was still a rebellion of artistic ambitions against the conventions of historical painting, and therefore caused great indignation.[11] By contrast, patriotic representations of the 1930s such as "Das Werden des Bundes" ("The Formation of the Confederation") (1939) by Otto Baumberger (1889-1961) were based on firmly established views of history and were hardly ever criticized.[12] L'Eplattenier's position was somewhere between the two: with fervor for the cause, using the still controversial Hodlerian expression,[13] he created a work that certainly did not cause a commotion in the officers' mess of the Colombier caserne, but may have succeeded in stirring up enthusiasm for the feat of defense. The painting "Installation défensive" sets itself apart from the almost ornamental oath and deployment scenes, in favor of a virile, haptic realism that heroizes the physical exertion in the crystalline Jurassic rock.

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[10] Charles L'Eplattenier, *La Fondation de la Suisse, 1935-46*, Colombier Castle, Salle des Armes (armory), Millevigne NE, oil on marouflaged canvas, *ca*. 4 x 23 m. The armory in Colombier Castle is located directly above the Knights' Hall ("Salle des Chevaliers").

[11] On the "Zürcher Freskenstreit" (Zurich frescoe affair) see, for instance, Oskar Bätschmann, Förderung in *Entfremdung*. *Zum Widerspruch zwischen Künstler und Öffentlichkeit*, in: *Der Bund fördert*. *Der Bund sammelt*. *100 Jahre Kunstförderung des Bundes* (Bern, 1998), 40-52.

[12] For example, see Matthias Vogel, *Im Korsett inhaltlicher und formaler Tabus*. Gedanken zur patriotischen Wandmalerei im 20. Jahrhundert, in: *Kunst + Architektur* (2004.1), 6-13.

[13] In 1915, a parliamentary petition "Heer" in the National Council called for limiting the influence of the artists' association GSMBA on organizing national exhibitions and awarding prizes and asked for seats for members of competing organizations such as the conservative "Secession" headed by Josef Clemens Kaufmann as well as for laymen in the Federal Art Commission.

Lower Ranft Chapel, Flüeli-Ranft (Sachseln OW), with the restored sixteenth century frescoes and the votive painting by Robert Durrer, Albert Hinter, and Hans von Matt, 1921. Photograph by Alex Winiger, 2013.

Robert Durrer, Albert Hinter, Hans von Matt, Votive painting, 1921, rear wall of the Lower Ranft Chapel, Flüeli-Ranft, Sachseln OW. Fresco, 4 x 9 m.

From 1920 to 1921, Robert Durrer led the restoration of the two Ranft Chapels and of the residence of Niklaus von Flüe (1417-87), the so-called "Ranftheiligtum" (Ranft sanctuary),[14] on behalf of the Schweizerischer Katholischer Volksverein (Swiss Catholic People's Association).[15] Durrer had attended art schools before studying law

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[14] It was only in 1947 that Niklaus von Flüe was canonized by Pope Pius XII.

[15] The order was preceded by a vow of the SKVV in 1914 to donate a votive offering, if Blessed Brother Klaus would save Switzerland from the war. The editor and politician Hans von Matt (1869-1932), a member of the SKVV and a friend of Durrer, made sure these funds went towards the restoration of the Ranft sanctuary and the associated votive painting, and defended Durrer's work against attacks from conservative, military-related circles. Von Matt was also the father of the third person involved in the execution of the votive painting, Hans von Matt (1899-1985).

Robert Durrer, Albert Hinter, Hans von Matt, votive painting, 1921, Lower Ranft Chapel, Flüeli-Ranft (Sachseln OW). Photograph by Daniel Reinhard, Sachseln, 2008.

Robert Durrer, Albert Hinter, Hans von Matt, Brother Klaus im-
ploring God to save peaceful Switzerland, with tricolored angels
(detail of Votive painting), 1921, Lower Ranft Chapel, Flüeli-
Ranft (Sachseln OW). Photograph by Daniel Reinhard, Sachseln, 2008.

and history in Bern and Geneva.[16] As the author of a volume on the
art monuments of the canton of Unterwalden (1899-1928), in which
he had examined the Ranft in detail, he was in some way predestined
for the accompaniment of the restoration. He was supported by the
experienced church painter Albert Hinter from the nearby monastery
village Engelberg, which proved to be lucky both for the uncovering
and reconstruction of the frescoes dating back to the late Middle Ages,
and for the creation of the votive painting respectively. The two men
were joined by the art student Hans von Matt Junior.

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[16] Among other things, Durrer studied at the Geneva École des Beaux-Arts with
Barthélemy Menn (1815-93), the teacher of Ferdinand Hodler. See Hans-Rudolf Meier,
Konventionelle Pioniere: Robert Durrer, Josef Zemp und die "Rahn-Schule," in: *ZAK*
(vol. 69 (2012), issue 3+4), 382.

Robert Durrer, Albert Hinter, Hans von Matt, General staff and soldiers (detail of Votive painting), 1921, Lower Ranft Chapel, Flüeli- Ranft (Sachseln OW).

Photograph by Alex Winiger, 2019.

The Lower Ranft Chapel was built as a pilgrimage chapel in 1501, after the death of Niklaus von Flüe, and was repeatedly modified over the following centuries.[17] The work of the restorers initially consisted of restoring the "original" design of the chapel.[18] Durrer reconstructed a gothic wooden ceiling and bricked four windows, but left and restored the baroque altar, as no adequate medieval alternative was available. The sixteenth-century painting cycles, which depict the life of "Brother Klaus"[19] on one side, the life of Christ on the opposite side, an Annunciation scene, the Adoration of the Shepherds, and the Magi on the altar wall, were completed. Frame lines also show the former limitations of the painting fields where they are lost. The never decorated back wall of the chapel was supposed to serve as a support for a votive painting designed by Robert Durrer in 1920.[20] Following the restoration of the historic building, in the summer and fall of 1921, Durrer, Hinter, and von Matt executed the painting true to Durrer's design within a few weeks.[21] Durrer claimed the authorship with the inscriptions "invenit" and "pinxit", Hinter is listed as another painter ("pinxit"), while von Matt is missing: he is said to have removed his name shortly after completion, fearing his involvement in the execution of this artwork could damage his future career.[22]

The painting is framed by a banner that expresses gratitude for God's salvation from harm. Through this framing and the stylistic and color adjustment, the picture unobtrusively adapts to the historical paintings. From a sea of flags and dead, skulls and skeletons, the apocalyptic riders swing upwards like a wave and thus threaten the rock of Switzerland, which rises from this boundless misery. On top of it, Brother Klaus implores God,[23] surrounded by angels whose colors

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[17] According to Durrer's inventory taken about 1900, the chapel was in an unsightly state at that time. There was no sign of the paintings anymore.

[18] See Durrer, Kunstdenkmäler, p. 1139. To understand the character of the restoration, see also Hans-Rudolf Meier, *Konventionelle Pioniere*, 381-390.

[19] Niklaus von Flüe's common nickname in Switzerland is "Bruder Klaus."

[20] See Odermatt-Bürgi (2018), 156-173.

[21] See Odermatt-Bürgi (2018), 158-159.

[22] See Odermatt-Bürgi (2018), 169.

[23] Albert Hinter depicted God as a glass painting in a baroque window opening, which the restorers had refrained from bricking.

adumbrate the French tricolor,[24] one of them opposing the war threat by resolutely holding a shield with a Swiss cross. A children's dance around an apple tree and a plowing farmer represent the idyll that is to be preserved. That's the extent of the patriotism.

About two steps below the angels stands a group of officers representing the General Staff, appearing somewhat goofy and vain,[25] while some brave soldiers guard a bridge. All sorts of candid and shady characters enter through the "back door" to the rock and are welcomed there by a waiter. References to the modern gas and machine war are used very cautiously. Visible is a gas mask, a sinking passenger ship, and one of the apocalyptic riders has taken the pose of an airplane.[26]

The representations as well as their form draw on historical models. The dance macabre as well as the apocalyptic riders could have come from Albrecht Dürer's Apocalypse of 1498,[27] the turmoil of the battle from Albrecht Altdorfer's "Alexanderschlacht" (Battle of Alexander at Issus) of 1529. The spiraling homeland rock with the partly sinister actions of its inhabitants on the other hand is reminiscent of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's or Abel Grimmers' representations of the Tower of Babel. These reminiscences create distance and authority at the same time. The viewer does not have to feel affected at all costs. There is a frame between him and the story. The depicted drama could possibly mean something remote, or something much more general: "Such is the war at all times." At the same time, the painters gain respect through their reference to traditional and historical representations. Even Hans Meyer-Rahn, a critic of Durrer, remarked in 1922 that "especially in ecclesiastical art, a much sharper criticism […] can be detected, without having harmed the church in the least [...]."[28]

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[24] See Marchal (2007), 460.

[25] See Odermatt-Bürgi (2018), 165-166.

[26] Comprehensive descriptions and interpretations of the elements of the votive painting can be found in the publications by Bürgi-Odermatt, Mörgeli, Marchal and Sarasin.

[27] In 1911, Albert Hinter had already completed a dance macabre painting on the wall of an ossuary in the neighboring village of Kerns.

[28] Letter from Meyer-Rahn to Eduard Nager of October 31, 1922, see Marchal (2007), 450. Hans Meyer-Rahn (1868-1954), attorney and long-time secretary of the Gottfried Keller Foundation, had incidentally criticized the lack of militancy in the portrayal of military personnel and the inadequate, non-national character of the Helvetic rock in Durrer's votive painting.

The historicizing "camouflage" seemed to calm the public. The critical potential was either not perceived by the press and visitors to the place, or felt to be harmless.[29] Religious and military circles reacted more sensitively.[30] Still today there are voices that point out that this is not a true votive painting.[31] The gratitude for God's protection expressed in it is mingled with the criticism of the fellow citizens: "Our dear fatherland was wonderfully protected ...," in other words: that you were saved is not your merit.

It remains to be noted that the painting is dedicated to the pilgrims for peaceful contemplation. It is a didactic medium that shall act slowly and sustainably. Not created during the war, but after danger was overcome, it did not need to shake up or unite, but was intended to stimulate reflection on what had happened. Durrer had operated similarly in 1915 with his text "*Kriegsbetrachtungen*"[32] ("Reflections on War"): he warned the Swiss of affective partisanship due to cultural neighborhoods, and to calculate where their existential (i.e. economic) interests lay (in this case, in a good relationship with England).

The votive painting in Ranft is indeed fatalistic and tied to a religious message, but surprisingly realistic in its representation of the forces that preserved Swiss peace. The actionist, physical realism that Charles L'Eplattenier introduced in Colombier, however, addresses physical strength, not critical intellect.

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[29] On (positive) reporting, see Bürgi-Odermatt (2018), 159. On "Identitätspräsentation" (presentation of identity) of the "island of peace" see Marchal (2007), 461. The newspaper *Obwaldner Volksfreund* wrote on September 21, 1921: "*Der Eindruck ist ein ganz gewaltiger. Man ist nur im Zweifel darüber, ob die grosszügige Auffassung, welche das Ganze beherrscht, oder die Mannigfaltigkeit der zahlreichen Gruppen, in denen der Grundgedanke zum Ausdruck kommt, mehr bewundert zu werden verdiene.*" ("The impression is quite enormous. One is only in doubt as to whether the generous conception which dominates the whole, or the multiplicity of the numerous groups in which the basic idea is expressed, deserves to be admired more.") Similar contributions appeared on Sept. 28, 1921, in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and on Oct. 1, 1921, in the Unterwaldner.

[30] See note 13. On Durrer's tense relationship with the clergy, see Bürgi-Odermatt (2018), 168-169.

[31] See Peter Spichtig, Friedensinsel Schweiz—zu welchem Preis?, on: kath.ch, Dec. 8, 2017.

[32] Robert Durrer, *Kriegsbetrachtungen* (Zürich, 1915).

Hall of the Water Lilies (Salle des Nymphéas) with the paintings of Claude Monet, Tuileries' orangery, Paris, in 1927 (photographer unknown). Source: Ministère de la Culture—Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine, Dist. RMN Grand Palais.

Memorials of the "Great War"

The Menin Road (1918) by Paul Nash.
Nymphéas (1914-26) by Claude Monet

According to an initiative by Lord Beaverbrook,[33] from 1918 on, twenty large-scale paintings depicting the warfare of eyewitnesses were to be shown in a pavilion designed by Charles Holden (1875-1960), on Richmond Hill in London. Although the project of this "Hall of Remembrance" was abandoned in 1919, a large part of the paintings

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[33] The Canadian-British publisher and politician, Lord Beaverbrook (William Maxwell Aitken, 1879-1964) was commissioned by the Canadian government in 1916 to design a tribute to Canada's war contribution. He developed the exhibition of a series of large-format paintings for a National War Memorial. In 1918, he was appointed Minister of Information by British Prime Minister David Lloyd George (1863-1945). In this capacity, he proposed to transfer eyewitness paintings of the Western Front that had been created according to an initiative of the War Propaganda Bureau of 1917 into a memorial hall in London.

Paul Nash, The Menin Road, 1918, Imperial War Museum, London. ©
Imperial War Museum (Art.IWM ART 2242).

were executed and finally handed over to the Imperial War Museum.[34]
The collection is exceptional in its scope, ranging from academic to
avant-garde painting, and contains works that go beyond the usual ste-
reotypes of patriotic heroism. The mood is elegiac. The scale of the
British Empire's merits is measured by the magnitude of the disaster.
Thus, the memory of the traumatic experiences receives the imperial[35]
consecration: "these our common sacrifices."

In his painting "The Menin Road,"[36] Paul Nash (1889-1946)
shows a rugged landscape in violent contrasts, dotted with rubble and
burnt tree stumps protruding into the sky covered by smoke and clouds.
Some scattered Tommies who seem to be searching the area, repre-
sented as tiny figures, can be recognized. Steely, two pillars of light
in the background break through the clouds, which could stand for a
supernatural force at work. Neither the heroic deed nor the conquest,

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[34] See Claire A.P. Willsdon, *Mural Painting in Britain, 1840-1940* (Oxford,
2000), 122-130.

[35] The term is used here as an analogon to the "national" in the French or Ger-
man context.

[36] Paul Nash, The Menin Road, 1918-19, oil on canvas, 182.8 × 317.5 cm   (Im-
perial War Museum, London).

but rather the destruction itself, is the motif of the painting. Nash does, so to speak, the opposite of L'Eplattenier, the latter showing only the (heroic) deed, but not the effect (of war).

Monet's "Nymphéas" cycle in the old orangery of the Tuileries Palace in Paris is not commonly perceived as a war memorial. Selected as a gift to the French state in 1914 by Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929), the paintings have been created partly during the war, in Monet's studio in Giverny, virtually within earshot of the cannon thunder. The installation, inaugurated in 1927 at the purpose-built destination, faced much opposition in the inter-war period. One reason for this was the "submarine" or "bunker atmosphere," which the oval room was said to have evoked together with the nearly non-objective images, visually affording little hold.[37] At the same time, the dissolved, deserted idylls can be perceived as a counterpart to contemporary battlefield representations.[38] Thus, the cycle has unintentionally, at least temporarily, fulfilled the function of remembering the war.[39]

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[37] See Jacques Emile Blanche, "En me promenant aux Tuileries," L''Art vivant, Sept. 1ˢᵗ, 1927, 694-696. Golan writes furthermore: "[…] installed in the space of the Orangerie that was apparently assigned to billet soldiers on leave from the trenches during the First World War, the Nymphéas tended to be yoked not so much to peace and beauty, the way they had been intended by Monet, as to the lingering memory of war." (Golan, 2009), 25. On the impression of a trench or bunker in the Orangerie, see Golan (2009), 26-28.

[38] Golan compares the "Nymphéas" with, for example, the Borodino Panorama (1912) in Moscow by Franz Roubaud (1856-1928), see Golan (2009), 29-32.

[39] The perception of the cycle changed radically with the new appreciation of Impressionism, which was seen as a pioneering style of non-figurative art after 1945. In 1952, André Masson (1896-1987) described the installation in the orangery as the "Sistine Chapel of Impressionism." See André Masson, *Monet le fondateur*, Revue Verve, 1952, vol. VII, issue 27-28, 68. See furthermore, Clement Greenberg, The Later Monet, in: *Art News Annual* (1957), 132-148, 194-196.
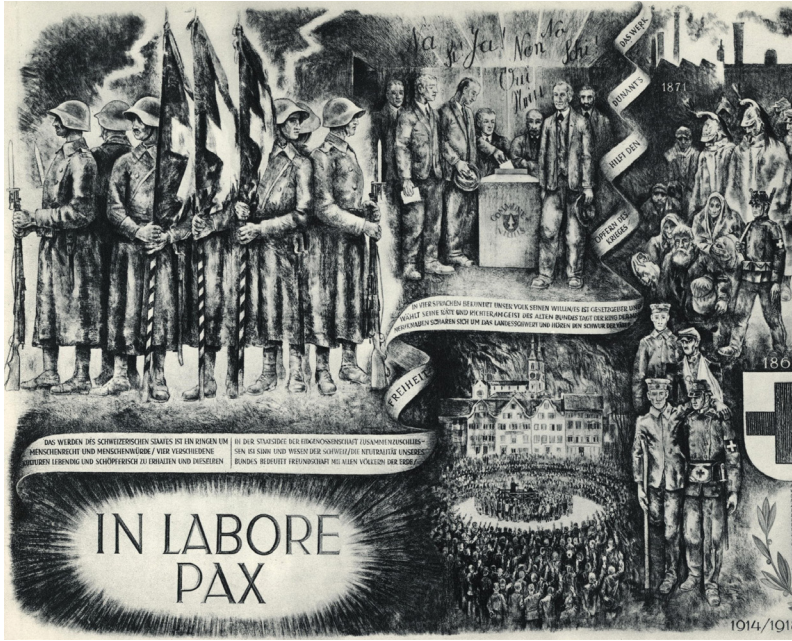
Fred Stauffer, Die starke Schweiz 1914 und die schwache Schweiz 1798 (detail), 1939, Swiss National Exposition, department Heimat und Volk (Homeland and People), Zurich (whereabouts unknown). Photograph by Jean Gaberell, Thalwil. Source: ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, Bildarchiv.

Canonized propaganda

Strong Switzerland 1914 vs. Weak Switzerland 1798 (1939) by Fred Stauffer. The Formation of the Swiss Confederation (1939) by Otto Baumberger. War Scene (1938-39) by Willi Koch

Images of contemporary warfare remained rare in Switzerland, even in the heyday of patriotism, the 1930s and 1940s. At the Swiss National Exhibition in 1939, the "Landi," two depictions stood out: Fred Stauffer's striking "Die starke Schweiz 1914 und die schwache Schweiz 1798" and the epic, 45-meters long "story book" "Das Werden des Bundes" by Otto Baumberger.[40] In Baumberger's illustration, the

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[40] Fred Stauffer (1892-1980) and Otto Baumberger (1889-1961), who worked as commercial graphic designers at the time like many other painters of the 1930s, created their monumental depictions at the Landi for the department "Heimat und Volk" ("Homeland and People"), where military mobilization and

Otto Baumberger, Das Werden des Bundes (detail), 1939, Swiss National Exposition, department Heimat und Volk (Homeland and People), Zurich (whereabouts unknown). Photograph by Michael Wolgensinger, Zurich, from: Hans Hofmann, Heimat und Volk, Zürich 1939, n.p.

Otto Baumberger, Das Werden des Bundes, 1939, Swiss National Exposition, department Heimat und Volk (Homeland and People). Visitors had to defile from one end to the other. Photograph by Michael Wolgensinger, Zurich. Source: gta Archives / ETH Zurich, Hans Hofmann.

phalanx of closely aligned military men appears above the words of "In Labore Pax" as the conclusion of a story full of warlike turmoil, while Stauffer confronts Switzerland overrun by foreign armies during the Napoleonic wars with an idyll surrounded by stalwart soldiers. Baumberger's monumental drawing was mounted in an otherwise empty, long corridor, illuminated by an opposite window front. The spatial arrangement forced the visitors to follow this history. This ensured that they saw the same thing: a "canonized" view of history for "*ein einig Volk*" ("a united people", to speak with Schiller).

In the same year, graphic designer Willi Koch (1909-1988, active in St. Gallen) created a cycle of paintings on mobilization[41] in a canteen of the Walenstadt caserne where he served, which contains a compressed but realistic war scene: two soldiers in combat uniforms and masks attack a sowing farmer with hand grenades. The land is devastated, a dead man lies beside the plow, a woman and children stare lost into space. Especially the expression of these surviving war victims shows similarities with contemporary images from besieged Barcelona shortly before the collapse of the Spanish Republic.[42] Although Koch's cycle is not at the same artistic level of the mentioned Landi artworks, this work in its awkward authenticity is nevertheless staggering. Like Baumberger's and Stauffer's, Koch's uniformed citizens stand to attention at the border, and there is no lack of genre scenes of conviviality. However, this last picture of the cycle bursts the "Landigeist" ("expo spirit") with its propagandistic conventions.

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40 (continued) political alliance were evoked in the face of immediate danger of war. Millions of visitors—the Landi counted slightly more than ten million admissions—Switzerland having four million inhabitants at the time—filed past the linearly   arranged works of Baumberger and Stauffer.

41 See Moritz Flury-Rova, Kunst im Aktivdienst. Die Wandbilder Willi Kochs in der Festung Selgis und in der Kaserne Walenstadt, in: *Kunst+Architektur in der Schweiz* 2004.1, "Patriotische Wandmalerei im 20. Jahrhundert," 47–51.

42 The US-American writer, artist and socialite Ione Robinson (1910–89), for example, tried to raise money and support for the Spanish Republic among the New York upper class with her drawings and photographs of the faces of war victims, especially children, created in Barcelona in 1938. See Francie Cate-Arries, Ione Robinson and the Art of Bearing Witness. Picturing Trauma in the Ruins of War, in: Nancy Berthier, Vicente Sánchez-Biosca (Ed.), *Retóricas del miedo*. *Imágenes de la Guerra Civil Española* (Madrid 2012).

Willi Koch, War Scene (detail), 1938–39, caserne in Walenstadt SG. Photograph by Alex Winiger, 2018.

Willi Koch, War Scene (detail), 1938-39, caserne in Walenstadt SG. Photograph by Alex Winiger, 2018.

Durrers and L'Eplattenier's works mark independent and different positions in this spectrum. The historical distance and the partial loss of their original function merges them as musealized forms of a monumental art, which has long since lost its outstanding position. However, even after a hundred years, the paintings reveal the war threat in different facets.

Notes on the Author

Alex Winiger, born in 1966, studied from 1987 to 1993 at the School of Design Zurich. As a result, he worked as an art teacher, visual artist, and as a museum and archives employee. Since 2006, he has been operating the online documentation mural.ch, a data collection on modern and contemporary mural art. He wrote the present text commemorating the 100-year anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.