

ABSENCE

CHANTAL MEZA

ART EXHIBITION

Missing in Conflict
An Evening of Art,
Testimony & Policy

Invitation only

April 21st 2026
17.30-21.00

Embassy of Switzerland
In the United Kingdom
Ambassador's Residence
21 Bryanston Square
London
W1H 2DR



Switzerland.



ICRC



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Embassy of Switzerland in the United Kingdom
Regional Consular Centre London



Working with

BritishRedCross



Welcome

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to *Absence* - an event addressing the missing in conflict by bringing together art, testimony and policy.

Hosted in partnership with the Swiss Embassy in the United Kingdom, the British Red Cross, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the University of Bath, the event will highlight the humanitarian, emotional, and generational toll of missing loved ones and draw attention to the importance of the protection of civilians, international humanitarian law and multilateralism in tackling these crises.

The occasion will also illustrate the important role art can play – in conversation with policy – to address this pressing issue.



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Absence is
the well of
suffering
from which
art emerges

Chantal Meza

The Missing: A current and global tragedy

The issue of missing persons, including victims of enforced disappearance, is one of the most devastating and long-lasting consequences of armed conflict and other situations of violence, disasters and migration. Hundreds of thousands of people worldwide, including thousands in the UK, live with the pain of not knowing the fate of their loved ones, while the number of missing persons globally continues to grow.

Behind each missing person is a family living in anguish and uncertainty. The psychological impact of not knowing whether a loved one is alive or dead, is profound and unique: it disrupts the natural process of grieving and healing, leaving individuals caught in a state of perpetual uncertainty referred to as ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss is compounded by economic, legal, administrative, psychological, and psychosocial challenges, as well as the need for their suffering to be officially acknowledged and for someone to be held accountable. Families can also face personal risks, such as exploitation and misinformation, and can sometimes be persecuted in their search.

The Global International Humanitarian Law Initiative and Peace

The staggering number of people going missing in today's conflicts underscores the urgent need for action to comply with international humanitarian law (IHL). Families have a right to know what happened to their loved ones. Under IHL, states and parties to a conflict must prevent people from going missing and account for those who do. Enshrined in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, these obligations continue even after hostilities have ended. Respecting IHL and addressing the issue of the missing are fundamental to successful peace processes and post-conflict recovery.

The Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law, launched in 2024 by Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan and South Africa, together with the ICRC, seeks to restore respect for the rules of war. With more than 105 States now onboard, Switzerland and the United Kingdom also play key roles as State Co-Chairs in Global Initiative workstreams. This event will reflect on current recommendations relating to the issue of the missing.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, such as the British Red Cross, trace missing persons, facilitate the exchange of family news and reunite separated families. The network has global reach, key for cross-border tracing, and works in close proximity to affected people thanks to its local volunteer networks.

Evening Programme

5:30 pm – Doors open – exhibition open for guests

6:00 pm – Opening remarks by Dominique Paravicini, Ambassador of Switzerland to the United Kingdom

6:05 pm – Rima Yaseen Al Khayat, Advocate for Families of the Missing, in conversation with Béatrice Butsana-Sita, CEO, British Red Cross

6:25 pm – Panel Discussion and Q&A

Noémi Krauer, Deputy Head of Humanitarian Diplomacy Section, Peace and Human Rights Division, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

Morris Tidball-Binz, UN Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions

Dr Rurik Marsden CMG OBE, Deputy Director and Head of Humanitarian Policy and Partnerships Department, Humanitarian Directorate, FCDO

Chaired by Philip Spoerri, Head of the ICRC Regional Delegation for the UK and Ireland

7:15 pm – Talk from Chantal Meza, Abstract Painter & Fellow at the University of Bath, on the exhibition and the importance of art

7:30 pm – Apéro Riche

Event Speakers



Dominique Paravicini
Ambassador of Switzerland to the United
Kingdom



Philip Spoerri
Head of Regional Delegation for ICRC
(UK & Ireland)



Béatrice Butsana-Sita
CEO, British Red Cross



Rima Yaseen Al Khayat
Advocate for Families of the Missing



Chantal Meza
Abstract Painter & Fellow at
University of Bath



Rurik Marsden
Deputy Director and Head of
Humanitarian Policy and Partnerships
Department, FCDO



Morris Tidball-Binz
UN Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial
summary or arbitrary executions



Noémi Krauer
Deputy Head of Humanitarian Diplomacy
Section, Swiss Federal Department of
Foreign Affairs (FDFA)

A close-up portrait of Chantal Meza, a woman with dark hair and eyes, looking slightly to the left. She is wearing a dark top with a lace-like detail.

About the artist

Chantal Meza is a Mexican abstract painter based in the United Kingdom. She is currently Artistic Engagement and Research Impact Fellow at the University of Bath.

Chantal's work-practice focuses on the human as seen through various forms of disappearance. She has connected this directly to educational and policy concerns.

Chantal's work is held in public and private collections around the world. Over the past 15 years her paintings have featured in exhibitions and biennials in prominent Museums and Galleries in Mexico, United Kingdom, Paraguay and Germany.

She has delivered many international lectures at reputable universities such as Harvard University; the University of Oxford; École Normale Supérieure, Paris; University College London (UCL); the University of Bath; and Goethe Universität, Frankfurt.

Chantal has also engaged in a series of public talks, including most recently with the multi-grammy winning Panamanian musician Rubén Blades.

She was recently appointed Artistic Director for the journal *the Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*.

Chantal Meza

Chantal's State of Disappearance series, which was created between 2017-2023 has been exhibited in a solo show in Bristol and also in London. Having been gifted to the University of Bath, it is now on permanent display at the Chancellors' Building at the Claverton Down campus.

Her solo Eden Bleeds show was exhibited at St Mary's Cathedral, Redcliffe, Bristol, during March/April 2025. Featuring 13 large works, it was the first contemporary art exhibition in the iconic venue's 800-year history and was featured on the annual BBC 1 Easter Sunday Service live morning broadcast.

In the summer of 2025, Chantal's Disappearance of Worlds solo exhibition was held at the JCR Gallery, Pembroke College, University of Oxford. Art from the exhibition was later acquired by the University for permanent display at Pembroke College.

Chantal has written extensively on the links between Art and Politics, while featuring on prominent news outlets such as the BBC's news and arts programs. Her work appears in many international publications and features on book/magazine covers.

Humanitarianism & Art

This event focuses on people missing due to armed conflict and other situations of violence, including those who are forced to flee for safety. Through Chantal Meza's powerful art, it brings home the human and often intergenerational toll that missing persons have on their families, communities, and societies.

In the context of psychosocial support to families of missing persons, art and creative activities are powerful alternative outlets through which families can express their emotions and ideas. Art can help families open up to one another and to others, while developing self-esteem and strengthening feelings of solidarity.

Art has always been a powerful way of raising public awareness. It can evoke empathy, provoke thought, and inspire action. In the case of missing people, it helps the public understand families' suffering, while honouring their experiences and advocating for solutions.

Exhibited Artworks

The Air that Torments Me. 2026. Oil on linen.
120cm x 170cm.

Earth. 2026. Oil on linen. 120cm x 170cm.

In the Dust of New Mexico. 2026. Oil on linen.
120cm x 170cm.


The Gaze of Persephone. Oil on linen. 2020.
55cm x 65cm.

In the Womb of the World. Oil on linen. 2026.
85cm x 100cm.

The Mexican Dream. 2026. Oil on canvas.
170cm x 190cm.

Visceral Ecologies Nos. II, VII & IX. 2019.
Mixed media on paper. 90cm x 110cm. Private
Collection.

Venus Devoured. 2026. Oil on linen. 85cm x
110cm.

The background is a dark, textured painting. It features a central horizontal band of light, possibly representing a reflection on water or a horizon, with a bright point of light in the center. The colors are predominantly dark browns, blacks, and oranges, with some lighter, more vibrant orange and red tones in the upper left quadrant. The texture is visible, suggesting brushstrokes or a similar artistic technique.

Find out more about the ongoing work on the missing,
and the Global Initiative on IHL by visiting:

www.icrc.org/en/what-we-do/reconnecting-families
redcross.org.uk/trace
www.upholdhumanityinwar.org/en

Find out more about the artist by visiting:
www.chantal-meza.com

*Thank you for supporting
families of the missing*