

## WALTER BENJAMIN'S SUITCASES MIGRATING DEVICES

Berlin-Bordeaux-Barcelona-Madrid-Portbou

This exhibition originates from a collaboration between several Fine Arts schools: Berlin's Weißensee Kunsthochschule (Visuelle Kommunikation Digitale Medien), Bordeaux's École des Beaux-Arts, Barcelona's l'Escola Llotja d'Arts i Disseny and Madrid's Casa de Velázquez.

Students and artists in residence developed a series of imagined suitcases based on the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, by Walter Benjamin (Berlin 1892 – Portbou 1940). Benjamin is thought to have had these texts with him in a suitcase, while fleeing into exile. He committed suicide in Portbou on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1940, after being arrested by the Gestapo, as he found out he was to be deported. The suitcases created by the students revolve around the notions of history, memory and the current European identity. Both Portbou, in its role as border and passage to exile, and the current situation of the refugees in Europe, lie at the centre of these works.

Benjamin's concept of history remains utterly current. His influence in today's art practice causes students to research and interpret the notion of history shown in Benjamin's work/suitcases. History, memory and exile have left a mark on Portbou. Places like the international railway station, the crossing point for thousands of refugees in the past, are an example of this.

The exhibition is housed in the station customs hall, the place where, up until the creation of the Shengen Treaty, traveller's suitcases were opened and inspected. Nowadays, this hall is used less and less; however, it has been given a new cultural role and is now an attraction to visitors as they discover the town. This exhibition aims at becoming a meeting point for youngsters, and to promote



Pilar Álvarez  
Estrella, 2016

public interest, as well as social and economical development.

The exhibition connects a series of geographic points relevant to Benjamin: Berlin, the city where he was born, Bourdeaux, a major city in France, a country where he was welcomed as a German refugee, and Portbou, on the Spanish border, the town where he decided to put an end to his life.

The exhibition will be on tour, visiting the Casa de Velázquez in Madrid, in March 2017, and will be shown at the Arts Santa Mònica in Barcelona in 2017.

**Pilar Parcerisas**  
Exhibition Curator

### Place and dates:

Portbou. Internacional railway station. Customs hall.  
24 September - 23 October 2016.

### Open:

Monday-Friday: 4:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Saturday: 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. and  
4:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Sunday: 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

[www.passatgescultura.org](http://www.passatgescultura.org)  
[info@passatgescultura.org](mailto:info@passatgescultura.org)

### Organizers:

Generalitat de Catalunya  
Departament de Cultura

SANTAMÒNICA

Collaborators:

adif

Rail Sider  
Mediterráneo

Consell Comarcal  
de l'Alt Empordà

With the participation:

llojja

weißenses  
kunst-  
hochschule  
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EBABX  
ART DESIGN RECHERCHE  
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CASA DE VELÁZQUEZ  
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MADRID

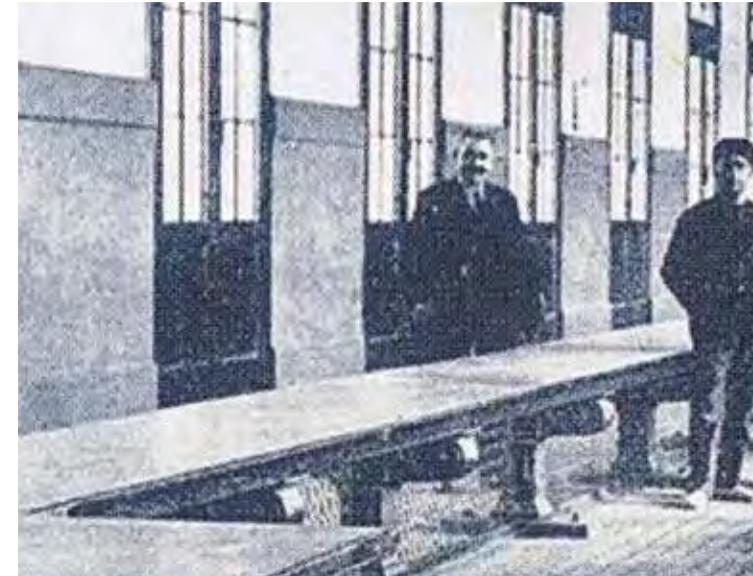
### Supported by:

Ajuntament de Portbou

Special thanks to:

Nàutica i Serveis Centelles

The 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Walter Benjamin's death. Portbou 2016



Thanks to: Subdirecció de Estacions de Viajeros Noreste de Adif; Sr. Josep-Lluís Salas i Mallol, Major of Portbou; Sr. Toni Sánchez, Adjoint to the Major of Portbou; Sr. Trino Hernández, Councillor of Portbou; Sr. Sergi Aranda, Councillor of Portbou; Sr. Ferran Roquer, President of the Consell Comarcal de l'Alt Empordà; Sr. Joan Centelles, Portbou; Sr. Jaume Reus, director Arts Santa Mònica; Sra. Fina Duran, Head of exhibitions, Arts Santa Mònica; Sr. Xavi Roca, Arts Santa Mònica; Sr. Xavier Baudoin, Casa de Velázquez, Madrid; Sra. Rachel Helvadjan, École des Beaux-Arts Bordeaux; Sra. Nora Ancarola, Escola Llotja, Barcelona; Sra. Anna Comellas, Escola Llotja, Barcelona; Sr. Hannes Brunner, Weißensee Kunsthochshule Berlin; Sra. Irene Cussó, Associació Passatges, Portbou; Sr. Adolf Alcañiz, Consell Nacional de la Cultura i de les Arts (CoNCA); Pablo Antolín, Railsider.

Display: Abdó Martí

Graphic designer: Manel Gràvalos Olivella

Photo: vintage postcard. J. Novell — Portbou — Saló Aduana - Secció viajeros

## WALTER BENJAMIN'S SUITCASES MIGRATING DEVICES

CUSTOMS HALL  
INTERNACIONAL RAILWAY STATION - PORTBOU  
24 SEPTEMBER - 23 OCTOBER 2016



Neus Masdeu  
Ell, tu i jo, 2016

## MEMORY AND EXILE

Escola d'Art i Disseny Llotja  
Barcelona

Portbou played a double role as border and passage to exile during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. For many, it was a place of crossing and hope, but for others it also meant arrest and despair. Walter Benjamin was one of the latter. In Spain, historic memory is still an unresolved matter. The students taking part in the exhibition have looked at events of today's history taking Benjamin's suitcase as a referent. The suitcase he carried while fleeing becomes a paradigm to overcome oblivion and suggest 'memory' as a key tool for democracy.

Participants: Airis Hierro, Alejandro Calles, Alexandre Franquesa, Ana Pulido, Ana Varela, Anna Comellas, Anna Lucas, Juan Carlos Lozano, Cristina Sánchez, Cristina Widder, Estela Rodríguez, Facundo Galera, Irene Scarpelli, Joan Pau González, Jorge Zavala, Judit Chulià, Julián Chamorro, Juliana Vélez Gutiérrez, Lola de Querol, Maria Cosmes, Mariko Kumon, Marina Fraga, Matías Rojas, Mercedes Ruano, Neus Masdeu, Nora Ancarola, Nuria Maya, Pilar Alvarez, Roser Vallès, Selma Brigneti, Sílvia Martínez Palou.

Professors: Nora Ancarola, Anna Comellas, Maria Lucas, Estela Rodríguez, Juan Carlos Lozano.



Luka Merlet  
Témoignages monde, 2016

## ON THE NOTION OF HISTORY

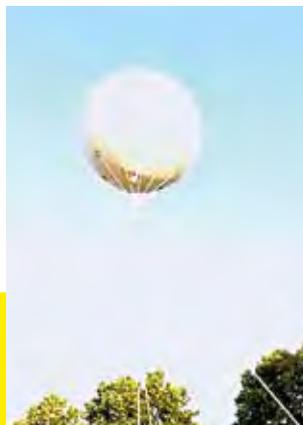
École des Beaux-Arts. (EBABX)  
Bordeaux

Walter Benjamin's take on 20th century history is expressed by the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. In this instance, Thesis VII has been approached in relation to cultural treasures: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism". With the backdrop of this border crossing between France and Spain, and passage to exile for thousands of republican revolutionaries, the students, without setting modernity and progress aside, have brought these facts face to face with the 'Angel of History' (*Angelus Novus*)

Participants: Kevin Huber, Pierre Mahoudeau, Luka Merlet.

Professor: Jean Calens, programme de recherche VUPPATLFD.

Pierre Mahoudeau  
«A rebrousse poil», 2016



Kanako Ishii  
Re-Landscape, Erinnerung und Heimweh, 2016

## ANGELUS NOVUS

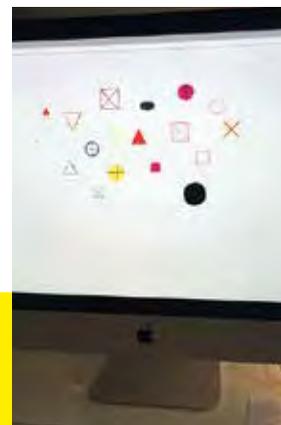
Weißensee Kunsthochschule  
Visuelle Kommunikation | Digitale Medien  
Berlin

The core of the work of the students is the messianic text *Angelus Novus*, by Walter Benjamin, where Benjamin puts history and progress into question, and describes the way in which the historical time of the past projects into the present. In practice, the idea is to redesign the artistic positioning of the thinker in relation to his work and biography: that which is cinematic, illustrative, interactive, photographic and topographic. There has been a debate on Benjamin's vision and documentation work around his role as a refugee and exile.

Participants: Alexia Manzano, Anka Helfertova, Charlotte Bräuer, Christoffer Ejbi, Denis Mertch, Kanako Ishii, MariaTurik, Petra Petterfy, Sascha Brylla, Steven Thelen.

Professors: Barbara Junge, Knut Ebeling, Wim Westerdel, Hannes Brunner.

Alexia Manzano  
Benjamin Hyperlinks, 2016



Maria do Mar Rego  
Fotografia maleta, 2016

## NARRATIONS AROUND W.B.'S SUITCASE

Casa de Velázquez  
Académie de France à Madrid

The occupants of the Casa de Velázquez de Madrid are emerging artists who have already completed their education. On the basis of the suitcase as an object and the enigma it contains, they have developed two essentially different narrations. On one hand, there is a sound narration that brings Portbou together with the sounds of another border, between Spain and Portugal. On the other hand, the narration contained in the suitcase shows the world as a library of organized and sorted cultural treasures and, at the same time, includes a mix of historical remains and personal relics.

Participants: Maria do Mar Rego, Vir Andrés Hera.

Vir Andrés Hera  
Reflections, 2016

