

Press Release

29 August 2017

Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes

The Akademie der Künste Makes the Friendship between Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht the Focus of an Exhibition

Exhibition opening: 25 October 2017, 7 pm

Press conference: 25 October 2017, 11 am

The relationship between Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) and Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) was an unusual one – between critic and poet, commentator and author, art theoretician and theatre director, scholar and artist, metaphysicist and rationalist. Benjamin and Brecht’s relationship reflects a century of extremes: in their conflicts as well as their productivity, in their astonishing ability to allow for the validity of contradiction, and in their harmonious moments as well as their unsettling ones. Much of what motivated them seems disturbingly relevant today: What is radical art? How does one confront social crisis? Who writes history?

For the first time an exhibition is dedicated to the subject of Benjamin and Brecht. Taking advantage of both archives that are housed at the Akademie der Künste – the Walter Benjamin Archive and the Bertolt Brecht Archive – the conditions for such an exhibition are ideal. It shows the topicality of their friendship, its historically documented aspects, resonances from friends and enemies, and moments of reception in ideas and art. Starting from their close personal relationship, this exhibition responds to Benjamin’s and Brecht’s names becoming ciphers, models for art and a particular view of the world.

On display is a selection of original items, some of which are lesser-known: Brecht’s chess board and a Chinese figure of Laozi, manuscripts of poems, diary entries, letters and photographs – key documents illustrating the pivotal and conflictual points in this relationship. The historical material is supplemented by original film and audio documents, and including recordings of early Brecht productions. Furthermore artistic works comment on past events from present-day perspectives: by Zoe Beloff, Adam Broomberg / Oliver Chanarin, Edmund de Waal, Felix Martin Furtwängler, Friederike Heller, Alexander Kluge, Mark Lammert, Jonas Maron, Thomas Martin / Irina Rastorgueva, Marcus Steinweg and Steffen Thiemann.

An extensive accompanying programme consists of readings, lectures, concerts and theatrical debates. Contributors include: Alexander Kluge, Corinna Harfouch,

Press and Public Relations

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Lorenz Jäger, Mara Delius, Friederike Heller, Kathrin Röggl, Marcus Steinweg and Hanns Zischler.

The book accompanying the exhibition is published by Suhrkamp Verlag. It was edited by Erdmut Wizisla, director of the Bertolt Brecht Archive and the Walter Benjamin Archive at the Akademie der Künste, and head of the exhibition's curatorial team.

The exhibition is funded by the Society of Friends of the Academy of Arts, the Hamburg Foundation for the Advancement of Science and Culture and the FRIES Group.

Exhibition Information

Title: *Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes*

Duration of the exhibition: 26 October 2017 – 28 January 2018

Opening hours: Tue – Sun, 11 am – 7 pm

Admission: € 9/6

Free admission for under 18s and Tues from 3 pm

Guided tours in German: Tue 5 pm and Sun 11:30 am, € 3 plus exhibition ticket

Regular tours in English will also be available

Ticket reservations: Tel. +49 (0)30 200 57-1000, ticket@adk.de

Location: Akademie der Künste, Hanseatenweg 10, 10557 Berlin

Press conference on 25 October 2017, 11 am

Advance registration is requested: presse@adk.de.

Exhibition opening on 25 October 2017, 7 pm

with Jeanine Meerapfel, Erdmut Wizisla, Corinna Harfouch, Hanns Zischler and Peter Thiessen

Publications

Benjamin und Brecht. Denken in Extremen

Erdmut Wizisla on behalf of the Akademie der Künste, (ed.),

Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2017, publication date: 23 Oct 2017

280 pages, approx. 120 illustrations, ISBN 978-3-518-42083-6, € 32

Mord im Fahrstuhlschacht. Tatsachenreihe von Bertolt Brecht und Walter Benjamin. Ins Holz geschnitten von Steffen Thiemann

Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 2017, publication date: 25 Oct 2017

Graphic Novel, 32 pages, 30 illustrations, ISBN 978-3-88331-223-1, € 7,50

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