

Press release

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The Akademie der Künste protests against the misuse of the commemoration of Walter Benjamin by the French Right

The Academy of Arts protests against the instrumentalisation of the Centre d'Art Contemporain Walter Benjamin by the new mayor of Perpignan, Louis Aliot, deputy of the "Rassemblement National", and is expressing its solidarity with the open letter of French intellectuals in [Le Monde](#) of 30 June 2020.

The Centre d'Art Contemporain Walter Benjamin has been in existence since 2013 in Perpignan, the city in the south of France that was on Walter Benjamin's route when fleeing from the National Socialists. At the instigation of the right-wing mayor, it is to be rededicated as a centre on forced migration and expulsion that commemorates the plight of Jewish refugees, of Spanish Republicans who had to flee Franco and of Sinti and Roma.

This rededication is part of a strategy of "dédiabolisation" by means of which the extreme right-wing party is cultivating a more moderate image in order to gain support for its xenophobic agenda in society's centre.

"We cannot allow the memory of Walter Benjamin to be exploited retrospectively as a means of legitimising right-wing politics," says Academy President Jeanine Meerapfel. "This would be like a renewed violation and persecution of his person. As the keeper of Walter Benjamin's estate, the Akademie der Künste objects to this misuse."

For the spring of 2021, the KUNSTWELTEN education programme and the Walter Benjamin Archive are planning a trip with schoolchildren via Perpignan to Portbou in Spain to retrace Walter Benjamin's footsteps leading up to his suicide. The aim is to communicate to the next generation an understanding of and respect for Walter Benjamin's plight and the values he stood for.

The Walter Benjamin Archive in Berlin was founded in 2004 as an institution of the Hamburg Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Culture at the Akademie der Künste. It preserves Walter Benjamin's estate as well as an extensive collection of documents from private collections. The holdings are regularly supplemented with a collection on the reception of his work. The archive also serves as the basis for the new critical complete edition of Walter Benjamin's works and estate (*Werke und Nachlass*) edited by Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz, which has been published by Suhrkamp Verlag since 2008.

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