

# **Presentation of the docuweb “Migrant Artists”; a new and unique focus on exile and artistic creation**

- Fundación BBVA and the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza are presenting their first docuweb
- *Migrant Artists / Cultural Networks* is the new project within the #ConectaThyssen programme
- An invitation to learn about the lives and experiences of seven artists obliged to emigrate during the interwar period
- As a space of reflection, this docuweb will be enhanced by online visitors' contributions

HOME ARTISTS CROSSED LIVES NO TO AMNESIA NETWORKS OF CULTURE PARTICIPATE THE PROJECT ESP

# Migrant Artists

## Network of Culture

This web documentary explores the life of different migrant artists and the potential of museums as spaces of hospitality.

The docuweb [Migrant Artists / Cultural Networks](#) invites viewers to learn about the lives and experiences of seven artists represented in the collection of the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza who were obliged to emigrate due to war, authoritarian regimes or the social and economic problems that affected the times they lived in. In collaboration with Fundación BBVA and within the #ConectaThyssen programme, the stories of Marc Chagall, Sonia Delaunay, George Grosz, Piet Mondrian, Romare Bearden, Ben Shahn and Hilde Isai have been the subject of study with the aim of discovering how their emigration experiences determined their day to day lives in exile, their artistic output and the influence on the countries they moved to.

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**More information and images:**

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza

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**Link to docuweb:**

<https://www.museothyssen.org/webdocs/conectathyssen/artistas-migrantes/en>



The docuweb format, employed by the museum for the first time, allows for the creation of digital spaces that present the Thyssen collection through new accounts, in addition to the possibility of adding archival documentation which enriches a reading of the works of art. The project has been conceived as a space of reflection that will continue to grow through the participation of online visitors. In addition, the initiative is aimed at researchers, students and the general public who will be able to access a wide range of material via different devices such as pcs, tablets and mobiles: photographs, videos, recordings, internal museum documentation, posters, texts and more, relating to the artists' lives and the role of contemporary culture.

Sonia Delaunay 

George Grosz 

Piet Mondrian 

Hilde Isai 

Marc Chagall 

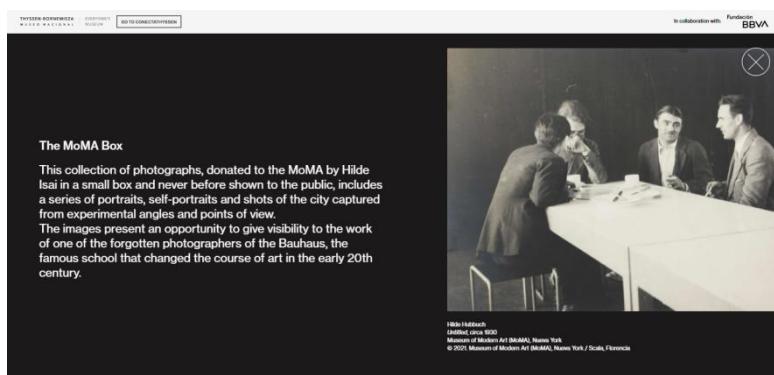
Ben Shahn 

Romare Bearden 

The recuperation of these migration stories raises a series of questions that may help in an understanding of culture and museums as spaces of encounter and social growth for society at large. With this aim in mind the documentary has benefited from the collaboration of different specialists in the fields of art history, anthropology, artistic creation and culture who analyse the context of the painters and their works.

While *Migrant Artists / Network of Culture* is structured into six principal sections (*Artists*, *Crossed lives*, *No to Amnesia*, *Networks of Culture*, *Participate* and *The project*), in contrast to linear documentaries the choices made by viewers when clicking on or browsing through the content and the pre-existing themes are taken into account.

### Artists



In this first section viewers can explore the careers in exile of various artists represented in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection through audiovisual works and two special photographic galleries associated with Ben Shahn and Hilde Isai. In the case of the latter, her gallery includes photographs that the artist donated to the

MoMA and which have not been shown in public since that time. The gallery devoted to Ben Shahn features a selection of images connected to the artist's work for the Farm Security Administration between 1935 and 1937 as part of the New Deal social programmes.

In the section *Front / Back* a photographic gallery allows for a visual exploration of both the front and back of various works. They include *Metropolis* (1916-17) by Georges Grosz, on the reverse of which the artist drew a constellation of stars that has survived alongside the registration number given to the painting when it was included in the *Degenerate Art* exhibition (1937); *The Madonna of*

*the Village* by Marc Chagall (1938-42); and *New York City 3 (unfinished)* (1941) by Piet Mondrian. In the case of the latter two, Chagall and Mondrian continued to work on them in New York after they emigrated to that city.

### **Crossed lives**

The artists who are the subject of this project lived through and experienced the worst of 20<sup>th</sup>-century history. This time line allows for a contextualisation of their lives through different knowledge layers relating to the political, social and cultural context.

### **No to Amnesia**



This is a linking section between the past experiences of migrant artists and a reflection on museums as spaces of encounter. In the audiovisual work *Documentary: The Untold* the artist and researcher Sara Torres reflects on migration and looks at the importance of administrative documents which artists were obliged to fill out in exile and which now represent an essential source for knowledge of their experiences in the countries to which they moved. Marta Ruiz del Árbol, Curator of Modern Painting at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, extrapolates the situation of numerous artists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day in order to reflect on the value of art for society.

The audio *Artists in exile* presents the work of journalist Varian Fry and art historian Margaret Scolari Barr, who helped numerous creators and other individuals to escape from Europe and from persecution for being Jewish or for their anti-Nazi stance. The figures of Fry and Scolari Barr demonstrate the need to promote cultural networks, particularly during times of crisis.

The section concludes with the hand-crafted work Walter Benjamin's Route. Created by the emigrant teacher and researcher Mafe Moscoso, it reprises Walter Benjamin's journey through the mountains that connect Banyuls (France) with Portbou (Spain) with the aim of reflecting on the situation of refugees in 21st-century Europe.

### **Networks of Culture**

What is the role of museums in the creation of networks and spaces of civil encounter? Can museums ensure that culture is understood as the shared heritage of every person? In the present day the concept of hospitality associated with cultural spaces is interpreted as the possibility of re-establishing the social tie that makes each of us feel that we are the "other". Through different formats this section offers access to the experiences, thoughts and gazes of artists, museum professionals, anthropologists and cultural managers on the issue of how to create community spaces and cultural networks in order to open up paths for action and reflection in museums.

### **Participate**

With the hashtag #ArtistasMigrantesThyssen, this project aims to promote users' active participation via Twitter with the aim of creating a visual and digital archive on stories of migration and hospitality. This unique album sets out to tell stories in order to remember the numerous different ways in which emigrants, either individually or collectively, have enriched the societies that accepted them and to record the interaction between cultural institutions and individuals who have crossed or are currently crossing an international frontier or have been obliged to change location within a country.

### **The project**

An audiovisual explains the context, content and working process employed by the numerous individuals who have generously shared their research, experiences and thoughts on the migrant accounts of seven artists present in the museum's collections.

### **And... The 1920s, a new thematic route on the Second Canvas Thyssen app based on works in the museum**

Complementing the documentary *Migrant Artists / Network of Culture* the app *Second Canvas Thyssen* now includes the thematic route *The 1920s*, which allows users to discover and learn more about works by different artists active in the interwar period. In contrast to the image of happiness and prosperity habitually associated with that decade (through media such as advertising, fashion and music), many artists and creators began to reveal its less visible side. As a result, this was a period when art began to function as a corner window - almost hidden and located in a liminal zone - which allowed for an observation from the margins of different realities affected by political agitation, social inequalities and identity issues.

The super zoom option to view the works is accompanied by an authentic storytelling based on different details which focus on a specific period in the recent history of the West in order to learn about their consequences. Why do we still refer to the 1920s as a light-hearted, positive period when it was in fact one marked by uncertainty and social instability? How do artists reproduce the experiences of a unique moment and construct the collective imagination? What situations did these creators live through? How did they represent their own life experiences in their works? How do these works relate to contemporary issues? Are we currently experiencing similar realities? And finally, what lessons can be learned from that period?

*Second Canvas Thyssen* is available free for iPhone, iPad and Android devices, as well as for Apple TV.