



**BERTOLT BRECHT'S**  
**PAPER WAR**

**EXILE IN AMERICA**  
**1941-1947**

**EXHIBITION**

The exhibition **BRECHT'S PAPER WAR** is not about Bertolt Brecht, the playwright, poet and theater director, or the revolutionary theatrical theorist with Marxist origins.

It uses a variety of texts and visual material in order to expand upon his views on World War II and the world of his exile in the USA between 1941 and 1947.

In various poems and plays as well as in his project **WAR PRIMER** and his **JOURNAL**, Brecht wrote commentaries and statements about politics and literature, the theater and the *theatrum mundi* during the war. As an European refugee and an outsider to the worlds of Hollywood and Broadway, Brecht lived in a permanent state of astonishment and alienation. Because of this, the **JOURNAL** as well as his poetry of this time became a tool of self-reflection and reflection of his American environment.

In his **JOURNAL** and in the **WAR PRIMER**, Brecht often used articles, photos and headlines from newspapers and magazines to create a new form of chronicle and diary with the technique of montage. He saw himself in the company of Sergei Eisenstein in film, John Heartfield in graphic art and John Dos Passos in literature.

Eighty years after Brecht's American exile begun, the exhibition **BRECHT'S PAPER WAR** looks through Brecht's glasses with contemporary eyes and tries to understand how he saw the *American Way of Life* during the time of Roosevelt, Truman and McCarthy by using the newspaper and magazine clippings that he collected and commented on.

By doing so, we expand and renew his own aesthetic *modus operandi* by adding context to his findings, combining and confronting texts and images in the way we understand and interpret his artistic practice.



BBA 278/05 sheet from the American Journal with cut from LIFE Magazine, May 12, 1941, pp. 28/29



Cover of the original edition of **KRIEGSFIBEL** (**WAR PRIMER**), Berlin (GDR) 1955 with cut from LIFE Magazine, February 22, 1943, pp. 26/27

almost nowhere has my life ever been harder than here in this mausoleum of easy going. the house is too pretty, and here my profession is gold-digging, the lucky ones pan big nuggets the size of your fist out of the mud and people talk about them for a while (...)

Journal, August 1, 1941

# IT'S WAR!

Cut from The Los Angeles Times, December 8, 1941

i was working on a film story for boyer with kortner when his son came in with the news that japan has begun to attack hawaii. we turned on the radio and it became clear to us that we were in the world again. a giant nation was rising, still half-asleep, to go to war. in the streets the drivers were crouched oddly over their radios.

Journal, December 8, 1941



Impediment is limited by Army orders to what each intersee could carry with him. Required of all were cooking utensils, bedding, tools of trade, bedding. The rocking chair shown here is pure luxury. Cut from LIFE Magazine, April 6, 1942, p. 16

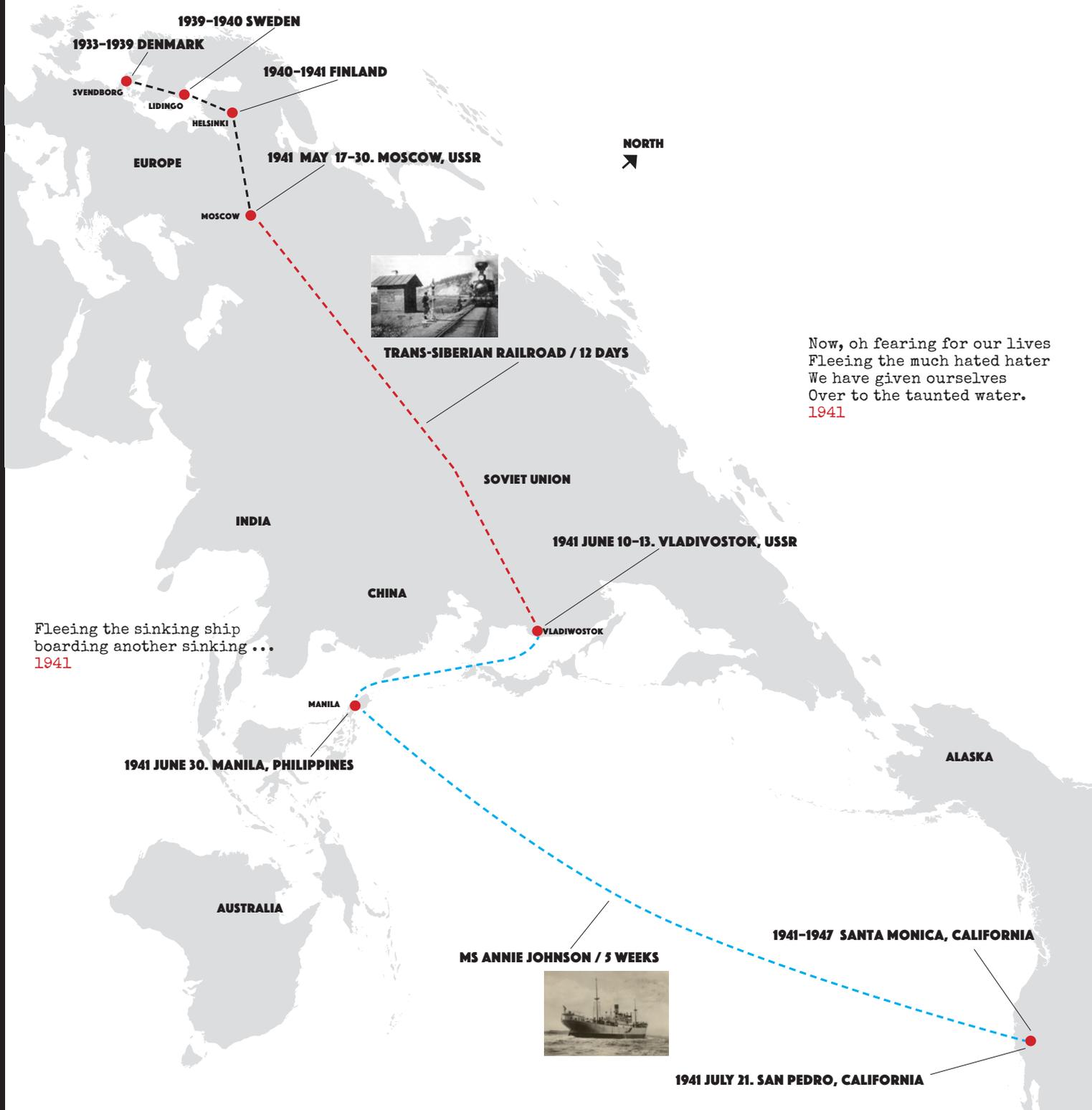
Autumn in California (1942)  
(...)

I saw a big autumn leaf that the wind  
Was blowing along the street and I thought: difficult  
To calculate the future course of that leaf.



in the last few days i have skimmed superficially right through this journal. naturally it is quite distorted, for fear of unwelcome readers, and i will have difficulty following its guidelines one day, it stays within certain bounds, precisely because bounds are there to be exceeded.

Journal, January 21, 1942



Fleeing the sinking ship  
boarding another sinking ...  
1941

Now, oh fearing for our lives  
Fleeing the much hated hater  
We have given ourselves  
Over to the taunted water.  
1941



### Stages of the exile

On February 28, 1933, one day after the Reichstag fire, Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel flee from Berlin via Prague and Vienna to Switzerland and from there to Svendborg in Denmark. They live and work at Skovsbostrand until April 1939, when the Brecht family manages to escape to Sweden shortly before the occupation of Denmark by the German Wehrmacht, and to Finland after the occupation of Norway in April 1940. Brecht and his family often escape their persecutors by only a few weeks, sometimes only a few days.

After receiving their entry visas to the United States, they leave Helsinki on May 15, 1941, and travel to Moscow via Leningrad, and from there to Vladivostok on the Trans-Siberian Express on May 30. The Swedish freighter *Annie Johnson* is the last ship to leave for America. The refugees are just nine days at sea when the Wehrmacht invades the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. After a stopover in the Philippines, the ship reaches the port of Los Angeles on July 21, 1941. Brecht and his family live in Santa Monica, California, until October 1947.

Only one day after his hearing before the House Committee Against Un-American Activities in Washington, DC, Brecht flies from New York City to Paris and from there on to Zurich on October 31, 1947. Helene Weigel follows him a month later, and on October 23, 1948, they both return to Germany after fifteen years in exile.

After arriving in Los Angeles and under the impression of the death of his collaborator Margarete Steffin in Moscow, Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, and the conditions of his California exile, Brecht cannot begin any new work for almost four months. In 1942 he writes a screenplay that director Fritz Lang will use to make the film *Hangmen Also Die* about the resistance against the Nazis in occupied Czechoslovakia.

From the fee he can afford to move to a house in Santa Monica, where he will live and work with his family until his return to Europe. There he meets old Berlin acquaintances and friends again, such as Elisabeth Bergner and Marta Feuchtwanger, Hanns Eisler, Alexander Granach, Oskar Homolka, Fritz Kortner, Peter Lorre, Heinrich Mann and Berthold and Salka Viertel.

Between 1943 and 1947, Brecht travels seven times to New York City for extended working stays, including Brecht evenings with his poems and songs at the New School for Social Research and at Hunter College.

In the spring of 1944, he writes a screenplay for the actress Luise Rainer, which is rejected by her and later becomes the play *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. He also begins collecting material for a play about Rosa Luxemburg, which we only know about because the files of the FBI, which has been watching Brecht since his arrival, record this project. The records themselves are considered lost.

At the end of 1944, he starts working with Charles Laughton on the American version of the play *Life of Galileo*, which is rewritten again after the atomic bombing of Japan in August 1945.

In February 1945, after the beginning of the Red Army offensive on the Eastern Front, he drafts a verse version of the *Communist Manifesto*, which remains a fragment.

On July 30, 1947, *Galileo*, starring Charles Laughton, premiers at the Coronet Theatre in Beverly Hills. In October 1947, rehearsals begin for the performance in New York City, which Brecht will not see again.



WHITE PUFF FLOATS OVER DARK COLUMN OF ATOMIC EXPLOSION AT NAGASAKI

"A White Puff floats over dark column of atomic explosion at Nagasaki." Cut from LIFE Magazine, September 17, 1945, p. 37

the heart stands still when one reads about the air-raids on Berlin (...) since they are not linked to military operations one can see no end to the war, just the end of Germany.

Journal, August 29, 1943



Cut from LIFE Magazine, March 26, 1945, p. 36

The gents in Downing Street hand out the blame I hear. You suffered it, it's all your fault. Perhaps, and yet-how seldom they complain At the people's inexplicable restraint.

War Primer # 79 transl. Tom Kuhn

Mr. Stripling :

Mr. Brecht, have many of your writings been based upon the philosophy of Lenin and Marx ?

Mr. Brecht :

No, I don't think that is quite correct but, of course, I studied, had to study as a playwright who wrote historical plays. I, of course, had to study Marx's ideas about history. I do not think intelligent plays today can be written without such study. Also, history now written now is vitally influenced by the studies of Marx about history.

From the testimony of Bertolt Brecht during the Hearings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, October 30, 1947

## BERLIN WIPING OUT COST SET AT \$18.75 TO EACH AMERICAN

DETROIT, Sept. 6. (AP)— Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. told a Labor Day War Bond rally here today that "we want to blast the city of Berlin off the face of the map," and estimated that it would cost possibly six times as much to do this as it did to crush Hamburg.

He placed the total cost of preparation, equipment and bombing of Hamburg at \$346,000,000.

"Say it costs six times as much to bomb Berlin," the Treasury Secretary said. "That will be pretty close to \$18.75 for every man, woman and child in the country —the price of a \$25 bond."

Cut from The Los Angeles Times, September 7, 1943, p. 2



Cut from LIFE Magazine, November 10, 1947, p. 50



**KALLE:** How do you put it together?  
Do you just write whatever comes  
into your head?

**ZIFFEL:** Certainly not. I organize.  
But with the material.

from Bertolt Brecht's REFUGEE CONVERSATIONS, 1941  
transl. Romy Fursland



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Exhibition

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