

*“IN THE
TROUBLED
AIR...”*

IMAGE - EMOTION - UTOPIA

CCCB

8 MAY - 28 SEPTEMBER 2025



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INTRODUCTION

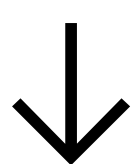
“In the troubled air” is an exhibition curated by the French philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman. The exhibition title is taken from a line in “Romance de la luna, luna” (Ballad of the Moon Moon), the first poem in Federico García Lorca’s *Romancero gitano* (Gypsy Ballads). An initial thought: in today’s politically turbulent times, with the rise of the extreme right throughout the world, violence against the civilian population in armed conflicts and constant threats to democratic systems, how can poets help us? “What use are poets in times of need?”, the German romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin wondered more than a century ago.

Didi-Huberman takes this question seriously and reclaims Lorca’s notion of the



duende as an aesthetic category that refers to an experience of special artistic intensity, characterised by a “mischievous - or insubordinate - innocence” and the troubling and tragic emotion of the “child confronted by death”. He also elevates the Granada-born poet to the highest level of aesthetic thinking in European history, alongside philosophers like Kant, Goethe, Schiller and Nietzsche.

The exhibition has been approached as a playful exploration of free associations between more than three hundred pieces of a different nature: paintings, photographs, drawings, prints, documents, books, sculptures, films... The space is arranged in three thematic blocks or sections, each one inspired by different verses by Lorca. Some of these sections are spread across several rooms. The first and last have the same title: *Childhoods*. Between them, are sections on *Thoughts*,



Faces, Gestures, Places and Politics, the latter being divided, in turn, into two segments, or *lines*, one devoted to mourning and another to struggles.

Programme text:
Lucía Montes Sánchez

CHILDHOODS

SECTION 1

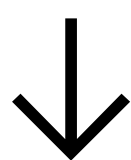
“The child looks at her, looks at her...

The child is looking at her...”

Federico García Lorca,
poem “Romance de la luna, luna” (Ballad
of the Moon Moon), *Romancero Gitano*
(Gypsy Ballads), 1928

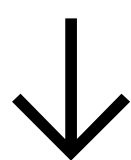
Children are not blind to our world, with its chaos and all. Often, they are afraid of it. But, with that fear, do they not look at the world, often, better than we adults do? And is this not because they look, at the same time, both very closely at the real and from the depths of their imagination? The child in García Lorca’s *Romancero gitano* sees something clearly: the moon. But isn’t he looking at something else too?

Georges Didi-Huberman, 2025



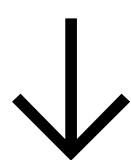
Childhoods opens with the two verses in “Romance de la luna, luna” that precede the line that gives the exhibition its title: “The child looks at her, looks at her... The child is looking at her...” The child looks fearfully at the moon, which flails its arms, and the air between them moves, triggered by this flow of exchanges. Through Lorca, we leave to one side the definition of air as an atmospheric gas and think about it as the medium of the gaze, the emotion and desire children are capable of. This is how Didi-Huberman invites us to experience it in this exhibition: not as a neutral medium, but as a container of individual and collective historical and psychological upheavals.

The moon is one of the protagonists of this section. It is not only a recurring motif throughout Lorca’s work, where it often symbolises death, but it is also the central theme in the drawings by Goethe on dis-



play in this room. Lorca took inspiration from the author's notion of the "demoniac" to invent his *duende*.

Together with the moon, the childhood gaze on the world is the other protagonist of this opening section. The wonder of the person who looks for the first time can be seen in the eyes of the children in the excerpt from Víctor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (The Spirit of the Beehive), in Val del Omar's photographs from the educational missions of the second republic, the *Misiones pedagógicas*, and Herz Frank's film *Ten Minutes Older*. But these eyes have also seen the worst of war. This is something revealed by the photomontages from newspapers and magazines and the short poems from the *Kriegsfibel*, or *War Primer*, by the German poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht, in which he assembles a sort of dictionary that sets out the horrors of the second world war from A



to Z. They are shown alongside an excerpt from Roberto Rossellini's *Germania anno zero* (Germany Year Zero), which shows the distress in the eyes of the child Edmund as he wanders alone and plays in the ruins of Berlin a year after the end of the second world war.

THOUGHTS

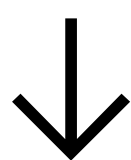
SECTION 2

“What mysterious thought

Moves and stirs the ears of wheat?...”

**Federico García Lorca, poem “Espigas”
(Wheat Ears), *Libro de Poemas*, 1921**

In what sense can we speak about these “commotions” that reach us when we are in front of certain beings, gestures, texts, or things? We have always hesitated between two approaches: to explain or to understand. Either we try to reduce emotions to a certain rule – an alphabet, a grammar, a dictionary – or we enter the dance in order to “understand” – to get caught up in – the emotions that show themselves to be “illiterate” in the world, as José Bergamín said.

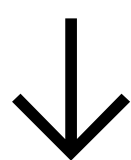


From then on, they no longer belong to a single subject. No longer fixed, they pass from one to another and, in passing, make of the ambient air a space that trembles, an emotionally “troubled air”.

Georges Didi-Huberman, 2025

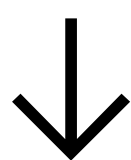
Thoughts is the most theoretical part of the exhibition. It draws on countless bibliographical and documentary sources from philosophical, scientific and artistic figures who have dealt with the problem of the emotions in two different directions.

For Didi-Huberman, *Literacy* and *Emancipation* are two radically different approaches when it comes to thinking and knowing the experience of commotion. The fundamental question is: what attitude and which methodological criteria do we use to confront emotions as theoretical objects? In the books and other documents by Des-



cartes, Johann Kaspar Lavater, Charles Le Brun, Matías de Irala and Charles Darwin presented in the *Line of Literacy*, there is a question of the shared method: an attempt to classify, once and for all, the emotions or passions, and to explain them in an axiomatic way. This means that, already, before we interpret them, we take on board criteria or classificatory principles as rules of the method, and the interpretation consists of including the particular experiences with emotions – for instance, symptoms or medical cases such as spasms and facial gestures – under the umbrella of these criteria. This gives us alphabets, albums, grammars and dictionaries that catalogue and classify passions.

The *Line of Emancipation* brings together examples from history, including Scarlatti, Calderón de la Barca, Beethoven, Nietzsche, Giordano Bruno and Georges Bataille, who sought to understand emo-



tions in all their complexity, with all the nuances the experience entailed. It also includes one of the key elements in the entire exhibition: the original manuscript of Federico García Lorca's lecture about the *duende*. The references presented in the *Line of Emancipation* approach the experience of commotion in a way Didi-Huberman describes as illiterate and heuristic. The heuristic approach, unlike the axiomatic one, is a model of knowledge that is reinvented in front of each theoretical object, because the subject it knows adjusts its principle and method to the rhythm of the object it is facing.

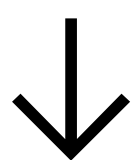
FACES

SECTION 3

**“The face with little blood, the eyes with
much night...”**

Federico García Lorca,
lecture *La imagen poética de Don Luis de
Góngora* (The Poetic Image of Don Luís
de Góngora), 1926. Quote from Góngora
“Romance de Angélica y Medoro” (Ballad
of Angelica and Medoro), 1602

**Our face is not merely a “blank wall” pierced
with “black holes.” Nor the assembly of “fea-
tures” supposed to define an identity on our
passport. Nor merely that collection of for-
ty-three facial muscles capable of produc-
ing the ten thousand expressions counted
by an American psychologist who consid-**

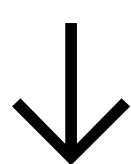


ered them a collection of reflex signs. Our face breathes. Through the ambient air we live, we breathe, we speak, sing, laugh, and cry. Is there, therefore, a secret exchange between our psychic movements and the “troubled air,” something we also call an “atmosphere”?

Georges Didi-Huberman, 2025

In *Faces*, Didi-Huberman freely explores the multiple ways of understanding the human face as a privileged place where our psychic movements and the troubled air come into contact.

Didi-Huberman’s selection of faces includes the final expression or look on a face, in the case of the death mask of Nietzsche; facial expressions that crystallise extremely intense emotions, like the pain and indignation on the bronze mask *Montserrat gritando* (Montserrat Screaming) by



the sculptor Juli González, a face that epitomises a mother grieving the loss of her son in the Spanish civil war, a motif we also find in the drawings by Picasso displayed next to her; poetic faces, akin to surrealism, drawn by Federico García Lorca; the atmospheres created by the facial movements brought together in the photographs of Medardo Rosso's sculptures; or Óscar Muñoz's installation *Alientos* (Breaths), which is made up of mirrors that conceal photographic images of the face of a dead person the artist has taken from obituaries. When the visitor breathes on the mirror, the image of the deceased is revealed, and they are brought back to life for an instant.

Another visual expression of this exchange between psychic movements and the troubled air can be seen in an exemplary fashion in the faces of flamenco singers captured in action. The expressions and gestures of El Chocolate and Inés Bacán in



Michel Dieuzaide's photographs are particularly striking, as is Isaki Lacuesta's installation *Música callada* (Silenced Music), which provides the coda to this section and examines, in minute detail, the facial gestures of flamenco singing by removing the sound of the voice and the emotion it contains.

GESTURES

SECTION 4

“The duende rises up from inside, from the soles of the feet...”

**Federico García Lorca,
lecture *Teoría y juego del duende* (Theory and Play of the Duende), 1933**

Gestures are ancient: our own fossils in movement. Aby Warburg studied their survivals in visual forms, as well as their changes of signification in history. These movements, however – wonderful challenges for sculpture – are the vehicles for our desires. They are extended between the energy of *pathos* and the energy of form. The *duende*, according to Federico García Lorca, was a model for this intensity that was already questioned by Goethe under the name



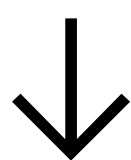
demoniac and by Nietzsche on Greek tragedy. By producing this intensity, gestures make the air swirl about itself, creating a dance of bodies with the “troubled air.” Hand gestures suffice to create a new space, as do – and even more so – dancing bodies. And so to the point of madness, which would be like the utopia of a body and a new space, an other air of the world.

Georges Didi-Huberman, 2025

Like the Italian poet and filmmaker, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Didi-Huberman believes politics cuts through every human gesture, no matter how simple they may seem. Human gestures repeat themselves in time: they have survived from antiquity to the present day. In this chapter, Didi-Huberman brings us a selection of human gestures that crystallise the intensity of commotion.



The selection includes the gestures of hands that, through tensions and their position, invent new spaces and reveal their full dramatic potential. This is particularly apparent in the bronze hand by Juli González, from the MNAC, as well as the plaster of Paris clenched hands by Auguste Rodin. We also find bodily gestures. Besides the many examples taken from dance and flamenco, the two photographs of Gonçal Sobrer's performance *Dansa de l'afusellament* (Dance of the Shooting) are particularly striking. In 1966, Sobrer staged this happening in the Poble Nou district of Barcelona, which simulated his own shooting. Maite Garbayo writes: "In the first photo, we see the artist wearing a suit, propped against a wall with his hands tied, just before the shot is fired. In the second, his body writhes and reacts to the impact of the bullet." This was Sobrer's way of remembering the 1,704 peo-



ple executed in the shanty settlement of the Camp de la Bota between 1939 and 1952. His happening represented an unofficial yet omnipresent image in the collective memory. Sobrer recalled the violence of the Franco dictatorship with his gestures and body, making the *Dansa de l'afusellament* an antidote to forgetting.

There are also examples of automatic gestures, sometimes associated with bouts of madness or experimentation with drugs, as is the case of the works by Antonin Artaud, Salvador Dalí, Henri Michaux and Unica Zürn. The chapter closes with a screening of Maria Kourkouta's beautiful video installation, *Treís ánemoi tou Aiólou*, (Three Aeolian Winds), 2023.

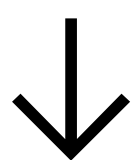
PLACES

SECTION 5

“Space and distance. Vertical and horizontal. The relation between you and I.”

**Federico García Lorca,
prose poem Santa Lucía y San Lázaro
(Saint Lucy and Saint Lazarus), 1927**

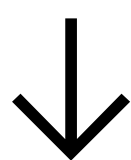
A place, a site, is much more than a “space” in the Cartesian sense of expanse. It is not a box in which we store objects. It is not a background from which figures can be detached. It is a field of tension, between distances and proximities. A movement, a commotion: sensitive like the wind, subtle like a cloud, terrible like the tempest, incisive like an angle that cleaves the air. It is the landscape when we feel as though



it is breathing. It is, to use the French expression for an unexpected silence in a conversation, "*l'ange qui passe*", an angel passing between people suddenly seized by a silence but without knowing why, traversed as they are by their history and by their unconscious.

Georges Didi-Huberman, 2025

For Didi-Huberman, sites or places are not spaces in the Kantian sense, defined as conditions for the possibility of experience, or in the Cartesian sense, as universal extensions containing objects within coordinates of length, breadth and depth. Places are spaces imbued with obsessions and desires and, thus, critical spaces thought from an anthropological point of view, steeped in the psychic movements of human beings.



The protagonists here are the media that are affected by emotions or, in other words, the troubled airs. Through different plastic and sculptural strategies, the works brought together here constitute spaces that have been altered by the tragic element of human emotion in which there is a more explicit visual exploration of this *troubled air*. The works in this space crystallise the movement of fluids, the skies, mists and winds that make the fabrics billow. These representations of physical media have the shared characteristic of bringing strength, particles, desires and emotions.

They contain sustenance, suspension and, at the same time, the shift and movement of material and psychological remains. Fontana's slashed canvas; the paintings by Joan Miró and the one by Simon Hantai; Victor Hugo's ink and wash drawings; Mar-ey's photographic prints; the clouds that burst onto the skies of Goethe, Gerhard



Richter and Tatiana Trouvé; Corinne Mer-
cadier's thought-provoking image. Final-
ly, the setting is transformed into a criti-
cal space, through the tension of a thread
by Sandback. Another, very important
cloud has been added to the exhibition
at the CCCB: the three-dimensional ma-
quette Antoni Tàpies made in 1988 for his
sculpture *Núvol i cadira* (Cloud and Chair),
which seems to soar, cloud-like, above
the Museu Tàpies in Barcelona. Pere Ca-
sanovas used this maquette to build and
install the large-scale sculpture that has
surmounted the building since 1990.

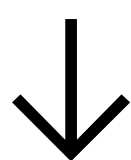
POLITICS

SECTION 6

**“They fought. They fought. They fought.
Thus all night. And ten. And twenty. And a
year. And ten. And forever.”**

Federico García Lorca, prose poem
La Gallina. Cuento para niños tontos
(The Hen. A Tale for Silly Children), 1934

**Political events turn the world upside down,
for the ill (massacres, mourning) and for the
better (struggle, freedom gained). The ill:
wars of invasion, ethnic cleansing, bomb-
ing of civilians, unhappiness of the survi-
vors. Exploitations, injustices, firedamp in
the mines. Or the entire sky’s upheaval over
Hiroshima and the desperate effort, for the
survivors, to show or represent it to other
people. The better: critical thinking, defi-**



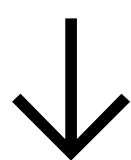
ance, and, from there, all forms and all levels of struggle against domination.

Mournings: Victims of oppression are mourned by survivors. But in these tears, in these gestures of lament, is there not already a call for justice? Is the lamentation or plaint not already an act of filing a “complaint”; that is, something of a political gesture?

Fights: To fight, then, against domination, against oppression. To transform lack of power into potency. And this by whatever means: through acts, gestures, words, writings, images . . . and so on, to the point that, as Chris Marker said, “the essence of the air turns red”.

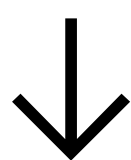
Georges Didi-Huberman, 2025

In *Politics*, Didi-Huberman finds two key moments in political events: lamentations and political uprisings against injustice, which he approaches across two themes: *Mourning and Struggles*.



The first proposes a constellation of lamentations in still and moving images, consisting of photographs, drawings, prints and excerpts from films. “It works as a collection of *Disasters*” which make us see the “cruellest and most violent dimension” of human history. It shows us the worst: murders, suffering and mourning. Violence brings with it pain, a pain expressed in the tears, faces and gestures that permeate the air around those who are suffering. In this regard, Picasso’s depiction of a mother holding her dead son, displayed in the middle of the room, is particularly harrowing. The immobility of the dead child triggers movement in the living: first, wails, cries, singing... and, afterwards, the struggle and conflict in response to injustice.

Saying “enough” emerges from lamentation, and, as a consequence, insubordination in the face of repressive, mur-



derous power. The struggles for justice emerge from mourning. This brings us to the *Line of Struggles*, which are manifested as different strategies designed to shape critical thinking: violent responses, the occupation of public space, new forms of communal living, public speeches and events, books, photomontages of images and words, prints, drawings and films. Three *Cinétracts*, militant short films made during the May 68 uprisings in France, and the impactful photographic sequence *Movimientos de una cámara* taken by Ferran García Sevilla during a demonstration in 1973. In all these forms of struggle, the underlying emotion is anger, rage, or *La rabbia*, like the title of the film by Pier Paolo Pasolini, which you can see an excerpt from.

CHILDHOODS

SECTION 7

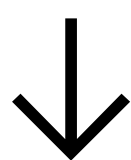
**“An air with the odour of a child’s saliva ...,
That announces the constant baptism of
recently created things.”**

Federico García Lorca,

lecture *Teoría y juego del duende*

(Theory and Play of the Duende), 1933

In the end, we must dedicate everything to children. This is neither a cult of naivety nor a belief in pure innocence. Children are at the crossroads: they seek a language between the real and the imaginary. They extend a genealogy (memory, a tree stump), and they project a genesis that is always multiple (desire, branches toward the sky). “The child looks, looks”, says the poem. It is



dark but aerial, like Lorca himself disguised as a shadow in *Life Is a Dream*. Under the bombs, children are still capable of utopia.

Georges Didi-Huberman, 2025

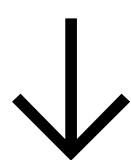
The epilogue of this exhibition repeats the title of the opening chapter: *Childhoods*. We already know that childhood is the interpretive key to this exhibition, as it is in Lorca, for whom “it was the site of intimate strangeness par excellence”: a strangeness that takes place between the innocence of their gaze and the “observation [of the tragedy] that tries to ruin it”. According to Didi-Huberman, “children see death everywhere and are afraid of it, of course; but to them, it is not irreversible: it is still something they can play with.”

In spite of everything, and whatever the circumstances, children play: Spanish children played during the civil war, as we can see in the photographs by Pando Bar-



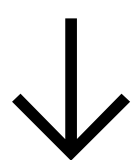
rero and the one by Cartier-Bresson, and the gypsy children Pérez de Rozas photographed near Barcelona in 1937; but Jewish children also played in the Warsaw ghetto during the second world war, as can be seen in the two photographs by Ringelblum, or the little girl in the streets of post-civil war Barcelona, portrayed by Joan Colom.

The drawings by the children, who survived a number of the last century's disasters, imagined and expressed their pain, and looked forward to a more hopeful future. They have now been added to the section featuring the children's drawings made during the Spanish civil war brought together in the book *They Still Draw Pictures!*, published in New York in 1938, with an introduction by Aldous Huxley. The *Manifest dels intel·lectuals catalans*, published in November 1936, is another important document: it is a call for international solidarity from Catalonia, which condemns



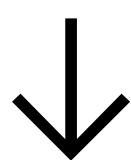
the indiscriminate airstrikes on the civilian population in Madrid by fascist bombers.

And so we reach the end. In spite of all these disasters, and no matter what the cost, we must “preserve the innocence of a child’s laughter within the tragedies of history”, like the smile Waad Al-Kateab manages to coax from her little daughter Sama, while the bombs of Bashar al-Assad and Russian aircraft fall on the region of Aleppo, in Syria, which closes the exhibition.



GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

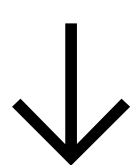
A philosopher and art historian, he is one of Europe's most wide-ranging interdisciplinary thinkers. He is a lecturer at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris and is well known for his extensive studies of the uses and meanings of images in contemporary culture, especially with regard to their ethical, political and symbolic dimensions. He has published such notable works as *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (University of Chicago Press, 2008) and *The Eye of History: When Images Take Positions* (The MIT Press, 2018). He has recently published in Spanish *Pasar, cueste lo que cueste* (Shangrila, 2018), which he wrote with the Greek poet Niki Giannari, taking an abstract view of the situation of



refugees to discuss the concepts of pariah, statelessness and migrant. His other titles include *Desear desobedecer: lo que nos levanta (I)* and *Imaginar recomenzar: lo que nos levanta (II)*, and, this year, *La Fabrique des émotions disjointes* (Les Éditions de Minuit, 2024).

He has curated exhibitions such as *L'Empreinte* at the Centre Georges-Pompidou (Paris, 1997, in collaboration with Didier Semin); *Fables du lieu*, at Le Fresnoy - Studio national des arts contemporains (Tourcoing, 2001); *Atlas* at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid, 2010) and *Soulèvements* at the Jeu de Paume (Paris, 2016), which was also presented at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya as *Insurreccions* (Barcelona, 2017).

Eight years later, he presents “**In the Troubled Air...**”, an exhibition co-produced by MNCARS (2024) and CCCB (2025), which runs alongside the exhibition *In the*



Philosopher's Workshop. Georges Didi-Huberman, curated by Lucía Montes Sánchez and produced by the Filmoteca de Catalunya (2025) and the Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid (2024).

CREDITS

“In the troubled air...” Image, emotion, utopia

8 May - 28 September 2025

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Georges Didi-Huberman

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