



IMAGE REMAINS



Left: *Angelus Novus* (Paul Klee, monoprint, 1920) exhibited in the Bode Museum, Berlin. *Angelus Novus* inspired Walter Benjamin to write the philosophy of the Angel of History (1939 - 40). Right: *Image Remains*, Drugo More, Rijeka (January, 2026).

IMAGE REMAINS

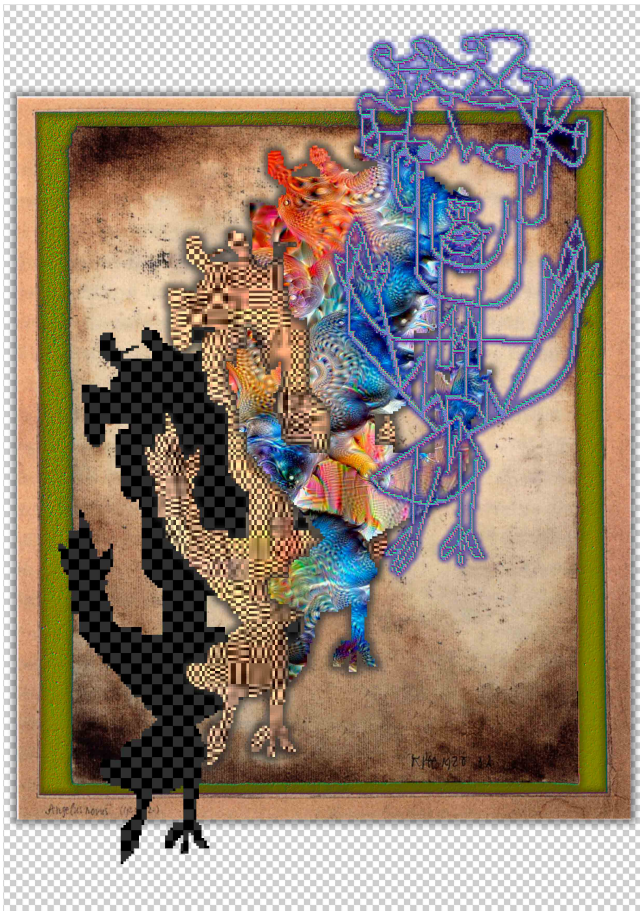
Exhibition by Rosa Menkman at Drugo More, Rijeka, Croatia.
15 January - 5 February, 2026.

Some images outlive their original meaning. They become myth. As they circulate, they may lose provenance, shift aesthetic, and even speak for someone or something else. What erodes is not just meaning, but the conditions (framing, context, and format) that once defined the image and its legibility.

In his 1940 *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin introduces the Angel of History as a figure that refuses historicism: the linear account of events written by those in power. The Angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But the storm we call progress has caught her wings with violence, propelling her into an unseen future.

Today, history, truth, and reality are aggressively reframed by those in power, as they write and rewrite memory in real time. rendering the Angel painfully current. What is left of Benjamin's Angel when her image is redeployed on a museum wall and in catalogue language to narrate continuity and advancement? What remains of her image when she is stripped of her refusal?

Image Remains follows the Angel through circulation and computation, as she narrates her attempts to reclaim agency within the realms of contemporary image processing. Across a triptych, she is classified, scheduled, and transcoded by protocols that decide how, where, when, and in what form she can appear. The exhibition asks what refusal can look like when her image becomes a governed, only partially visible multimodal object that moves through networks, across cycles of updates, and into systems that privilege machine readability.



In 2009, I was invited to create a commissioned performance, a live AV piece for *SOUND & TELEVISION* on Danish national television, curated by Kristoffer Gansing and Linda Hilfling. The series marked the switch-off of PAL (Phase Alternating Line) in Denmark, after the transition to DVB (Digital Video Broadcasting).

At that time, much of my setup still relied on analogue technology. As obsolescence crept into multiple steps of my workflow, I felt a deep connection to Benjamin's Angel of History, the figure who keeps her eyes fixed on the wreckage that progress leaves behind. For me, that image mapped immediately onto PAL, a standard being phased out in real time. During the performance, the Angel became my protagonist. I was her, saying goodbye to the signal PAL, quietly looking back, contemplating all the compromised ways of reading and writing, and the memories that would soon become harder to access, or disappear altogether.

Since The Collapse of PAL, the Angel has remained a protagonist in my work. To create some continuity I developed *Destitute Vision*, a long-form narrative that spans over almost 2 decades now. In this still developing story I follow the vision of the Angel of History and describe how it is affected as it becomes filtered, scheduled, compressed, and re-rendered through systems that do not care whether she can still read what they output.

Image Remains (this exhibition) is part of that longer narrative arc.



My visit of the Angel at the Bode Museum, May 2025.

I knew that Benjamin's Angel is inseparable from Paul Klee's 1920 monoprint *Angelus Novus*, which Benjamin acquired in 1921 and kept with him ever since. Benjamin's philosophy of the Angel was inspired by that print. But during my many years of working with the Angel, I had never seen Paul Klee's original *Angelus Novus* in person: the print is considered 'fragile,' and is usually kept safe in the Israel Museum's archives. However, during the summer of 2025, the Angel was on display at the Bode Museum in Berlin, celebrated as "the return of Berlin's Angel." When, in a stroke of luck, I heard about this, I booked the first train out, and went on my way to meet her.

In the early hours, before the museum was even open, I sat in front of it, waiting. It was me and a handful of other people. Soon enough, it became clear that some of us specifically came for the Angel. We didn't speak, but we did walk in an awkward procession as we stopped for no other artifacts, up along the winding stairs following the signs that brought us to her.

When I finally locked eyes with her, the experience touched me more than I expected. But I am still not sure *what part* of the Angel I met then.

What I remember most is not the print, but the staging.

The Angel was mounted on a specially erected, giant burgundy-red wall, supported by oversized grey skirting boards that functioned almost as a second frame. A security guard stood next to the wall at all times, and the alarm was triggered easily (I accidentally set it off a few times). I think I may remember the scene more than the print itself.

The 2025 exhibition catalogue intensified this institutional reframing. Jörg Völlnagel presents the loan of the print as a hopeful return linked to the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel and argues for an optimistic "looking ahead," contrasting it to what he calls Benjamin's "history-pessimistic" interpretation.

Dieses Mal jedoch, so könnte man den geschichtspessimistischen Einordnungen Benjamins optimistisch entgegenrufen, lohnt sich auch der Blick nach vorne. Heute, zum 80. Jahrestag der deutschen Kapitulation im Zweiten Weltkrieg am 8. Mai 1945, und auch – das soll hier nicht ungenannt bleiben – zum 60. Jubiläum der Aufnahme diplomatischer Beziehungen zwischen Israel und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland am 12. Mai 1965, reist der kabbalistische Engel als Symbol der Hoffnung in eine Stadt, die mal die seine war, aus der er vertrieben wurde und in die er nun triumphal und janusköpfig zurückkehrt, um uns zu zeigen, dass Fortschritt nicht ohne das Wissen um die Vergangenheit, dass Erinnerung nicht ohne das Streben nach einer besseren Zukunft existieren sollte – aber auch, dass blinder Fortschrittsgeist, gepaart mit Geschichtsvergessenheit, ins Verderben führt. Der Engel kommt zur rechten Zeit – seine Reise von Jerusalem nach Berlin ist ein mächtiges Symbol der Mahnung und der Freundschaft zugleich, auch wenn es dabei »nur« um Gerechtigkeit und nicht um Versöhnung geht.

This time, however, one could optimistically push back against Benjamin's history-pessimistic readings and say that looking ahead is worthwhile too. Today, on the 80th anniversary of Germany's capitulation in the Second World War on 8 May 1945, and also (this should not go unmentioned) on the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany on 12 May 1965, the kabbalistic angel travels as a symbol of hope to a city that was once its own, from which it was driven out, and to which it now returns triumphantly and with a Janus face. The angel returns to show us that progress should not exist without knowledge of the past, that remembrance should not exist without striving for a better future, but also that blind belief in progress, paired with historical amnesia, leads to ruin. The angel arrives at the right time. Its journey from Jerusalem to Berlin is a powerful symbol of warning and of friendship at once, even if it is "only" about justice and not reconciliation.

Excerpt and translation to English from the essay "Wenn Engel reisen ..." by Jörg Völlnagel from the Bode Museum exhibition catalogue. *Der Engel der Geschichte : Walter Benjamin, Paul Klee und die Berliner Engel 80 Jahre nach Kriegsende*. Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, 2025.

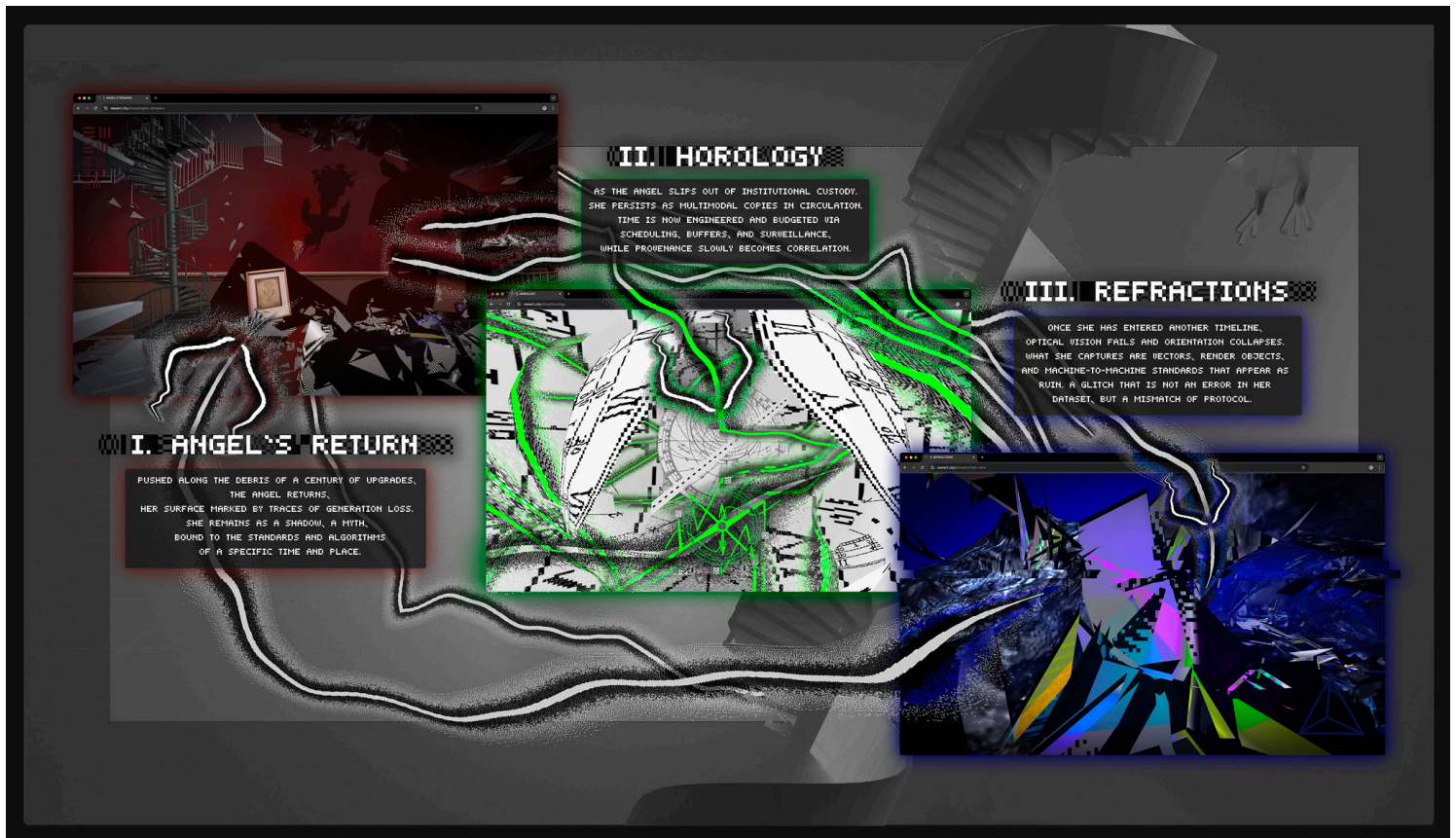
What troubles me is not the act of remembrance: remembrance is an integral part of the Angel. What I take issue with is the re-writing of the Angel's function as a symbol of reconciliation. The violence lies in converting an object of active remembrance into an instrument of governance: an image administered to lock sanctioned meaning into a governed moment. In the Bode Museum context, the Angel returns as a diplomatic image; a managed symbol that can be installed, captioned, and timed, while signalling moral closure that excludes ongoing violence and repression. Which illustrates how state power can stage justice as concluded, even as the unresolved legacies of the Second World War continue to produce violence both locally and elsewhere, including in Palestine.

The framing of the Angel in the Bode Museum is a form of what I would describe as *operational historicism*: a mode of historiography where meaning is not argued but executed. When institutions produce *historical truth* through actions such as scheduling, display, captions, press and catalogue output, via methods of speed and repetition, they attempt to control circulation: the artifact performs designated closure at a preselected moment. This type of operational historicism produces history as a timed, managed output, but also has a second consequence: what does not conform to the dominant template becomes harder to present and retrieve, and easier to exclude from the record entirely. Not because it vanishes, but because the conditions don't give it space to exist.

This is why, when I locked eyes with *Angelus Novus*, I did not see the object that inspired Benjamin to write about the *Angel of History*. I met a reframed object that the institution projected history onto. The realisation sits inside this exhibition, *Image Remains*, where I try to negotiate what happens when the image that was meant to hold space for the voices and signals of those that are actively suppressed, is overwritten. What happens when an image that already lives in circulation is pulled back into a controlled frame: can the Angel refuse?

The Angel remains an image, but what remains of that image? Custody, framing, captioning, scheduling, compression, editing, meme-ing, transcoding, degradation — all of it washes over her. The image that remains is not a neutral remainder, it is what survives protocol. It becomes myth because it refuses this imposition of closure, even when it is framed and captioned.





EXHIBITED WORKS

I. ANGEL'S RETURN (video, 3:12 min)

The Angel traverses a century of upgrades. As artifacts mark her wings, generation loss washes over her. She becomes a shadow, a myth, bound to the standards and algorithms of a specific time and place. Her mission remains: she refuses a singular resolution of history as written by those in power.

II. HOROLOGY (video, 3 min)

As the Angel slips out of institutional custody, she persists as multimodal copies in circulation. On the platform, engineers schedule her appearance through administered moments that depend on buffers, attention cycles, and surveillance.

III. REFRACTIONS (video, 8:27 min)

The Angel is on a mission to learn from a Cyclops vision (a vision of future demise). But once she enters its timeline, optical vision fails and orientation collapses. What she captures are vectors, render objects, and machine-to-machine standards that appear as ruin. A glitch that is not an error in her dataset, but her lack of protocol.

IV. ANGEL REMAINS (framing wall + wall in frame)

A rebuilt version of the 2025 Bode Museum display. The installation presents the Angel's "return" as a framing device, showing how custody, timing, and design can arrest the image, scripting it into state narrative.

A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

- Walter Benjamin. *Thesis IX*

PROLOGUE: *THE ANGEL OF HISTORY*

In 1920, the Swiss-born German painter Paul Klee produced a figure using an oil transfer drawing with watercolor, resulting in what is later described as a monoprint. The process produced lines that look both handmade and mechanically displaced, leaving a strange mix of creature-ness and diagram. He named the figure *Angelus Novus*.

The German philosopher Walter Benjamin saw the Angel at a major Klee exhibition in Munich and bought it in 1921 for 1,000 marks. Accounts describe how the Angel travelled with Benjamin from Berlin when he had to flee, and how its material survival became inseparable from Benjamin's life and political catastrophe. Benjamin fled Germany in 1933, after the Nazis came to power, and settled in Paris. As the regime stripped German Jews of their citizenship, Benjamin became stateless. He was arrested by the French authorities and incarcerated for three months in a prison camp near Nevers, in central Burgundy.

After his release, he returned to Paris. In January 1940, as Europe collapsed around him, he drafted "*On the Concept of History*", later published as *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. In this text, Benjamin criticises historicism, the governing method of *history production* that presents the past as a continuous narrative of progress. This kind of history is typically written from the position of those in power (the oppressor), and treats the present order as if it had been destined to arrive. Benjamin argues that this model of time, that presents itself as *homogeneous and empty*, lets fascism appear as normal. Benjamin proposes *Jetztzeit* (now-time) as a time that is "not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now." *Jetztzeit* names a present full of political charge, that can break the continuous flow of history. In thesis IX, Benjamin describes how these concepts are embodied by the Angel of History.

Benjamin mailed a copy of his theses to Hannah Arendt, who later passed it on to Theodor W. Adorno. At that moment, both the manuscript and the Angel existed in transit: neither belonged to a place. Each dependent on care and transmission, to remain in future.

As the German army pushed the French forces back, Benjamin and his sister fled Paris for Lourdes, leaving just a day before German troops entered the capital with orders to arrest him. In August 1940, he obtained a travel visa to the United States, negotiated by Max Horkheimer. He planned his journey through Spain and neutral Portugal.

Benjamin crossed the French-Spanish border and arrived in the coastal town of Portbou on 25 September 1940. There, the Franco regime cancelled all transit visas and ordered the Spanish police to return the Jewish refugee group he had joined to be deported back to France the next day. Expecting capture, Benjamin took an overdose of morphine that night.

Before fleeing Paris, Benjamin had left the print of the Angel for safekeeping with Georges Bataille, who hid it at the Bibliothèque Nationale. After the war, the work passed via Theodor W. Adorno to Gershom Scholem. After Scholem's death, his wife left the print to the collection of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where it remains in the archive and is only shown occasionally.



Installation view as part of **THE IMAGE REMAINS** at the NTTICC



Installation view as part of THE IMAGE REMAINS at the NTTICC

ADDENDUM FOR THE IMAGE REMAINS AT NTTICC (TOKYO, JAPAN: JUNE 2026)

In 2026, two months after the opening of my solo show *Image Remains* at Drugo More in Rijeka, Croatia, *Angelus Novus* was scheduled to appear once again outside its home at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. This time, it would appear as a centrepiece in *Paul Klee: Other Possible Worlds*, an exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York, running from 20 March to 26 July 2026. The exhibition featured approximately one hundred paintings and drawings by Paul Klee, including *Angelus Novus*, the work that Walter Benjamin interpreted as *the Angel of History*.

However, when the exhibition opened, the Angel had not arrived. The original remained at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem because the United States and Israel had attacked Iran, disrupting air mobility across the region.¹ A sign in the museum announced: “Due to current conditions affecting international transport, the shipment of the original artwork has been temporarily delayed.”² An object associated with the accumulation of catastrophe could not cross the borders due to

¹ Deborah Solomon, “A Paul Klee Angel Finally Lands in New York,” *The New York Times*, May 8, 2026, updated May 9, 2026.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/08/arts/design/paul-klee-angelus-novus-jewish-museum.html>

² Fred Voon, “New York’s Jewish Museum Opens Paul Klee Exhibition Without Its Centrepiece,” *The Art Newspaper*, April 1, 2026.
<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2026/04/01/paul-klee-angelus-novus-missing-exhibition-jewish-museum-new-york-iran-war>

ongoing military violence. The Angel of History, propelled forward by the storm called progress, had been halted by another contemporary storm.

While the exhibition opened without its centrepiece, the Angel was still there: in place of the original was an authorised exhibition copy. A facsimile that had not been made specifically for this interruption, but had been intended to rotate with the original, which, because of its sensitivity to light, can only be exhibited for four weeks at a time. But the delayed shipment changed the status of the copy: the temporary double filled the absence of an object that war had prevented from arriving.³ Benjamin's own account of technological reproducibility becomes difficult to avoid here. Rather than dissolving the Angel's aura, reproduction became one of the means through which it was institutionally reconstructed around an absent original.

The copy was installed within a recessed burgundy red panel in an otherwise empty gallery dedicated to the work. The red wall I had encountered in Berlin in 2025 had, in some form, been rebuilt. It was not the same structure, but its resemblance was so striking, it suggested the wall may have become part of the Angel's contemporary exhibition apparatus.

The mounting of the Angel against an imposing red architecture creates a strange distance. In the Bode Museum, a line on the floor prevented the viewer from approaching it. At the Jewish Museum, the recess itself kept the image beyond reach. In both exhibitions, the scenography produced an enforced separation between the viewer and the Angel - almost requesting a particular kind of approach from the viewer. Moreover, the distance gives the Angel gravity. The small and fragile image becomes monumental through the space that surrounds it. Yet this monumentality also changes the conditions of the encounter. The Angel is presented as something that must be protected, approached with caution, and viewed across a boundary. The fragility thus becomes architectural.

In New York, however, the architecture framed an absent original. The protected object was elsewhere, while its authorised double occupied the designated place. The wall, the label, the recess and the security protocols continued to produce the Angel as present. The exhibition could proceed because the image remained operational even when the object did not arrive. This adds another question to *Image Remains*. What remains of an image when its movement is interrupted? In the context of *Other Possible Worlds*, the remainder became a regulated double occupying the place reserved for an absent original. The Angel remained through substitution. At the same time, the reason for her absence entered the exhibition indirectly, compressed into the administrative language of "current conditions affecting international transport." The delayed journey gave the Angel another history. Catastrophe was no longer only what she looked back upon; it orchestrated her conditions of appearance.

³ Fred Voon, "New York's Jewish Museum Opens Paul Klee Exhibition Without Its Centrepiece," *The Art Newspaper*, April 1, 2026.
<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2026/04/01/paul-klee-angelus-novus-missing-exhibition-jewish-museum-new-york-iran-war>



Installation view of Paul Klee: Other Possible Worlds at the Jewish Museum, New York
Photo by Kris Graves Projects/Julian Calero

