Baggage Claims
Fact Sheet

The number of artists across the globe who are incorporating suitcases, luggage and crates into their work suggests the incredible mobility of our global culture. Luggage is a powerful emblem of uncertainty and change implying fleeing, exile and homelessness. Suitcases transport and hold our belongings, and by implication memories. Many artists use found, worn luggage. Others design and fabricate new kinds of containers for travel and living.

Artists under consideration

Richard Artschwager, US; Mieke Bal & Shahram Entekhabi, NL/DE; TaysirBatniji, PS; WaleadBeshty, UK/US; YoaCapote, CU; Hussein Chalayan, CY/UK; André Leon Gray, US; Subodh Gupta, IN; Mohamad Hafez, SY; Dan Halter, ZI; AveryLawrence, US; Joel Ross, US; Katrin Sigurdardóttir, IS; ClarissaTossin, BR/US; YinXiuzhen, CH; AndreaZittel, US

Organizer
Orlando Museum of Art, Florida

Curators
c², a curatorial partnership between Ginger Gregg Duggan and Judith Hoos Fox, develops exhibitions of international, cross-media contemporary art and design that explore current issues in culture.

Contents
16 works—sculpture, video, installation
Annotated, illustrated checklist follows

Space
4500 square feet approx

Schedule
Orlando Museum of Art, Florida
Sept 15-December 30 2017
Weatherspoon Art Museum, Univ of North Carolina, Greensboro
Jan 27-April 29 2018
AVAILABLE
Summer 2018
Peeler Art Center, DePauw Univ, Greencastle, Indiana
Sept 1-December 9 2018
Weisman Art Museum, Univ of Minnesota, Minneapolis
Feb 2-May 13 2019

Publication
Fully-illustrated book including curatorial essay, artists’ bios, a newly commissioned series of poems by Vidhu Aggarwal, faculty member in Poetry and Postcolonial/Transnational Studies at Rollins College, and portfolio of images and text by noted photographer Brian Ulrich, Guggenheim recipient who is on the faculty of RISD, created specifically for this publication.

Accompanying materials
Wall text and extended labels will be provided electronically

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Exhibition description

Baggage transports and holds our belongings, and by implication our thoughts. As objects, trunks, suitcases, luggage and crates suggest the extreme mobility of our global culture. As ideas, they refer to the humanitarian and political concerns that instigate this mobility, that dominate national and international conversation and policy. Luggage is a powerful emblem of uncertainty and change. The term baggage also carries a psychological meaning: things that encumber one's freedom, progress or development.

The curators will examine the work in Baggage Claims through the lens of global mobility. This mobility is the result of political, economic, natural and social conditions. It affects broad sectors of the population, through the benign commodification of hospitality (think Airbnb) to the horrific displacement of millions of immigrants and refugees as a result of crises occurring around the globe. Each work in the exhibition suggests multiple readings. On the one hand, each work tells the story of individuals: their journeys, suffering and memories, their hopes for possibilities ahead. Simultaneously, the same work refers to the politics and policies that create and shape those individuals' experiences: ethnic cleansing, contested borders, lack of social services, environmental cataclysms. The works in the exhibition, some humorous, others eliciting heartbreak, address both the personal experience and global policies, the consequences and catalysts of mobility.

There are historical precedents for focusing form and content around baggage, perhaps most notably in the work of Marcel Duchamp. Boîte-en-valise, 1935-1940, was a means for the artist to present a self-contained retrospective of his work. As a portable mini-monograph, the valise served as a readymade container for a body of work that questions the notion of originality, authenticity and the artist’s hand.

While the suitcase appears periodically in works by Joseph Cornell, Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol, we don’t see luggage as multivalent subject until Robert Gober’s Suitcase from 1997, an enigmatic element that is part of a large installation that further confounds an attempt at a singular interpretation. Altered so that the bottom of the suitcase becomes a grate above a dark bottomless opening in the floor, the container is now an abyss.

More recently, German artist Isa Genzken addressed issues of global mobility and the War on Terror in her major installation OIL XI, 2007. A sea of roller board suitcases, backpacks and assorted piles of belongings appear to have been abandoned while ominous NASA astronauts float overhead as if surveying the remains of a lost culture. Following her major 2013–2015 retrospective organized by MoMA, the installation was unfortunately in need of conservation and not available for Baggage Claims. However, this installation was one of the early sparks of interest in the subject from a curatorial perspective.
Recently, many artists have turned to luggage because of its rich potential meanings, some creating new kinds of baggage and containers, others exploiting the sentiments evoked by found and used objects. Referring to baggage both as physical object and abstract idea, the artists included in Baggage Claims are addressing the subject matter on multiple fronts.

Considering the work in the exhibition as both object and idea provides a framework for looking at the interlacing factors and layers that the artists working with this imagery are addressing. We live in an increasingly global society, where our economies and politics reverberate in reaction to each others’ developments. That the artists in this exhibition come from Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the US makes perfect sense. The uncertainty of the global conditions — political, social, environmental — resonates through all the work in the exhibition. Policy and politics resulting from these precarious forces are catalysts for conditions that profoundly effect populations: emigration, immigration, displacement for example. And these huge population shifts, on the personal level, become the stories of individuals, their direct experience, their lives. Some artists express these issues on an ideological level, proposing new ways of living in this world order, reflective of current conditions. Others, perhaps uncertain of the future, address loss and loneliness.
Always interested in the challenge of how to depict space, in this work, Artschwager craftily encloses 1000 cubic inches in a variety of configurations. Though the artist approached this as a formal problem, in the context of this exhibition the readings suggest many different narratives from the ubiquity of our baggage to the particularity of what we carry.
Mieke Bal & Shahram Entekhabi
MB: born 1946 Heemstede, the Netherlands
lives and works in Amsterdam, the Netherlands
SE: born 1963 Beroujerd, Iran
lives and works in Berlin, Germany

Road Movie, 2004
17 minutes

Depending on when one enters the gallery space, the one-shot film looks either like a still photograph, evoking a traditional landscape painting, or like a film. On a four-lane highway, dangerously close to the cars, on the edge of a green median stripe of hollow road, a man is walking. The man in the somewhat shabby, slightly out-of-style, but very proper suit and black shoes just walks away, his back turned to us. He carries two old cardboard suitcases. He walks fast and disappears into the distance, into nothingness.
Then something happens again. Turning from a small speck into a recognizable figure once more, the man returns, thereby relieving the tension created by his absence. Was he sent back at the other end, refused entry or chased away, or did he return because the destination had nothing to offer? Or, alternatively, did he return in belated acknowledgement of the viewer?

http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/road-movie/
Taysir Batniji
Born 1966, Gaza, Palestine
Lives and works in France and Palestine

Untitled, 1998
suitcase, sand
measurements variable

For a generation of children growing up in this volatile situation [Gaza, Palestine], home is not necessarily a site of nurturing and security. It can also be a repository of traumatic memories or a series of temporary accommodations.

Gaza-born, Paris-based Taysir Batniji’s ... [Untitled was] made in response to and as a part of the artist’s experience of living in what he describes as the “space that is neither here nor there. This other space that is not home but not elsewhere either...a sort of in-between, a space with no borders where I feel at home, albeit a temporary home.”

http://bmoreart.com/event/taysir-batniji-full-bleed-lease-agreement
Taysir Batniji
Born 1966, Gaza, Palestine
Lives and works in France and Palestine

Transit, 2004
video 6:22

The video Transit by Taysir Batniji tackles the issues of borders. The Palestinian artist presents a silent slideshow, made up of photographic images, that he made clandestinely at border passages between Egypt and Gaza. The photographs of people waiting are alternated with black screens, metaphors for emptiness and the passing of time, reflecting the difficult and often impossible conditions of mobility for today’s Palestinians. The video addresses notions of travel and displacement as well as the situation of being between two cultures and identities.

https://vimeo.com/44748888
The artist has made a glass box, to fit exactly into one of FedEx’s ready-to-ship boxes, which are copyrighted — not just the logo but the dimensions of the very box itself. The glass cube is shipped via Fed Ex, and what arrives — the glass broken or not, the box with stickers, labels, bent corners, etc. — is the resulting work of art. This uber-Duchampian action and creation take on a range of issues, from the power of corporations to the meaning of art. In the context of this exhibition, the self-identification of one with one’s means of migration is suggested. The artist began this ongoing series in 2007 with quite a number of different sized and configured works resulting.
Yoan Capote  
Born 1977, Pinar del Rio, Cuba  
Lives and works in Havana, Cuba

*Nostalgia*, 2004 - 2013  
suitcase, bricks and cement  
33 1/2 x 21 1/4 x 13 3/4 inches

*The artist used his own luggage after traveling from Havana to New York. The interior space of his suitcase, as an allegory of a window, was closed with the bricks of Manhattan. It is a piece that embodies, in a poetic manner, the situation of traveling and immigration. The baggage is always the object that contains our memories and more important things when we are traveling. The brick wall and its weight create a metaphor about the impossibility of returning and also about the barriers we carry in life.*

Hussein Chalayan
Born 1970, Nicosia, Cyprus
Lives and works in London, United Kingdom

Afterwords, 2000
video

Afterwords (2000) was inspired by the horror of having to leave your home at the time of war. Initially Chalayan took the inspiration from how Turkish Cypriots (including members of Chalayan’s family) were subjected to ethnic cleansing in Cyprus prior to 1974 (as there were attempts to annex Cyprus to Greece). After talks with his family Chalayan explored the idea of how we may want to hide our possessions or how we may want to carry them with us on departure in such an ordeal. In this light a living room was created.

http://chalayan.com/afterwords/

In this collection, the models remove the furniture slipcovers that become garments, and the furniture pieces themselves fold into carrying cases that can hold belongings and be easily transported.
André Leon Gray
Born 1969, Raleigh, North Carolina
Lives and works in Raleigh, North Carolina

*Carry On*, 2008-10
acrylic and black gesso on found suitcase with iron planter
19 x 21 x 18 inches

“If one can’t travel physically, the mind will suffice,” observes the artist who looks to his African ancestry, and the cultures of Black America today to create his work that he refers to as, “gumbo.” The symbols and images diagrammed on the chalkboard surface of the suitcase reference race relations, political and social consciousness as well as personal identity.
Subodh Gupta
Born 1964, Khagaul, Bihar, India
Lives and works in New Delhi, India

Untitled #11, 2006
cast aluminum
18 1/8 x 21 1/4 x 29 1/2 inches
dition of 3

[Commentary on this body of work] reflects Subodh Gupta’s concerns about the transformation of the rural milieu in which he grew up. Each individual in this poor, traditional, society has been suddenly subjected to the precarious nature of migration represented by the endless to-and-fro between countryside and city – and between India and the world at large. Amidst this ambient chaos, there is something intimate about personal luggage. This precious cargo has refuge value – as a miniature home…meticulously reproduced in polished bronze, like cult accessories or ceremonial objects….silver luggage is transformed by the hope and desires invested in them. Physical displacement, places of transit, means of transport, the objects that accompany the latterday nomad... all are present in the work of Subodh Gupta.

Mohamad Hafez
Born 1984, Damascus, Syria
Lives and works in New Haven, Connecticut

A Refugee Nation, 2015
plaster, paint, antique type writer case, found objects, mp3 media player, rigid foam
14 x 30 x 12 inches

A refugee nation represents the sad reality of the conflict. It emerges the viewers in the present while taking them into a nostalgic trip of what once used to be one of the oldest civilizations in the world.

The work attempts to shed light on one of the most awful humanitarian crisis in modern day history; A crisis so grim that many chose not to acknowledge and can no longer bear witness to its daily atrocities.

Nestled in an antique typewriter briefcase, the exterior of the work reflects the deep connection and sadness displaced Syrians have towards the events unfolding in their country. It sheds light on the new aesthetic cities have taken while highlighting living conditions that –for many- have become their new reality.

Moved by the vast magnitude of the crisis, and particularly as seen in the Zaatari refugee camp, the work pays homage to the strong will power of all civilians forced to shelter in decrepit structures or torn tents in the middle of the Arabian desert, maintaining a minimum level of existence and piecing together what has been left from their lives.

The use of lights telegraphing through the windows, deteriorated clothes hanging on laundry lines, and multimedia contribute to the substance of the work. A built-in audio player plays a recording taken by Hafez during his last trip to Syria in early 2011 and before the war has broken out. Recorded in the courtyard of the Great Omayyad Mosque of Damascus, voices of children playing and merchants conversing and laughing can be heard throughout the space, providing a grim reminder of a scene no longer existent. In the recording, a recitation of verses from the holy Qur’an is heard. Ironically, those verses are usually used for remembrance of martyrs and consoling grieving families as though the recording was hinting of what is to come. In the background a peaceful call to prayer is also heard. The echoing sound vibrates within the briefcase providing a fourth dimension to the work and a life of its own.

http://www.mohamadhafez.com/A-Refugee-Nation
These cheap Chinese-made plastic-weave bags have become almost synonymous with refugees and poorer migrants the world over, much like the carpet-bags of centuries gone by. Today the movement of these people is as contentious as ever.

The bags are frequently named after the most common immigrant demographic in an area. They are colloquially dubbed things like: ‘Ghana Must Go’ bags in Nigeria, ‘Türken Koffer’ or ‘Polen Tasche’ in Germany, ‘Guyanese Samsonite’ in the Caribbean, ‘Bangladeshi Bag’ in the UK, and ‘Shangaan or Zimbabwe Bag’ in South Africa.

I have been working with these bags as a material in my art for some time.

http://danhalter.com/category/work/the-original-is-unfaithful-to-the-translation/
Avery Lawrence
Born 1985, Charlottesville VA
Lives and works in New Orleans LA

Arranging Suitcases, 2012
objects, works on paper and video
9 minute video
https://vimeo.com/39207698

In this absurdist video, multi-media artist Avery Lawrence transports through New Orleans a burden of blue cases, inventively transporting them across train tracks and canals, to ultimately set them down, unpack their contents, and demonstrate the futility of existence. Hilarious, poignant and odd, that this video was created in and for New Orleans, a city perhaps doomed by definition, adds particular resonance.
Joel Ross  
Born 1966, Port Arthur, Texas  
Lives and works in Urbana, Illinois

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**ROOM 28, 1997**  
dismantled motel room in vintage suitcases

An entire motel room that held memories of an imagined now-over romance is repacked in a minimal stack of vintage suitcases. Interested in the ability of a space to hold meaning, Ross is exploring whether that emotion can be transported.
Katrin Sigurðardóttir
Born 1967, Reykjavik, Iceland
Lives and works in New York, New York and Reykjavik, Iceland

plywood, modelmaking materials
88.6 x 64.9 x 9 x 31/2 inches
Collection of the Reykjavik Museum of Art, Iceland

What began as the artist’s actual tool kit that she’d travel with gradually turned into the container of multiple connected boxes, each depicting in detail a park near where she had once lived — New York, San Francisco, Reykjavik. She could keep her homes with her as she moved about. The tool kit became a receptacle for memories, experiences, home, which adds up to identity.
Clariissa Tossin
Born 1973, Porto Alegre, Brazil
Lives and works in Los Angeles, California

Work damaged by customs during search for cocaine upon reentry to the United States from Colombia, 2015
hydrocal shoe casts from "Sneaker Thief" (2009), crate with repurposed wood, TSA notice of baggage inspection
24.5 x 22 x 19.5 inches

Work damaged by customs during search for cocaine upon reentry to the United States from Colombia is precisely what the title states. Part of Tossin’s 2009 work ‘Sneaker Thief’, these remains bear the marks left by the structures and regulations of travel, precisely the TSA. The group of damaged sneaker casts rest atop two modified shipping crates rebuilt from wood used in the original shipment.
http://www.clarissatossin.net/How-does-it-travel
Yin Xiuzhen
Born 1963, Beijing, China
Lives and works in Beijing, China

Portable City Dunhuang, 2010
installation, suitcase, used clothes, magnifying glass, map, sound and CD player
33-7/16 x 11 x 30-7/8 inches, closed

With her Portable Cities (2003) Yin Xiuzhen furthers her stocktaking analysis of the present. The Asian city landscapes of Singapore and Shanghai tread alongside western capitals such as Berlin and Vancouver in suitcase format. By creating a patchwork out of articles of clothing, the artist joins together memories of humans and events, forming images of cities in miniature. The noises and melodies of these places reverberate from the depths of these suitcases. What Yin Xiuzhen achieves with her ‘portable cities’ lacks a material counterpart: her suitcases award duration to this experience.

Andrea Zittel
Born 1965, Escondido, California
Lives and works in Joshua Tree, California

_Living Units A-Z_, 1993
mixed media installation
Albright-Knox Art Gallery

Part of an on-going investigation of the meanings of freedom that includes re-evaluating living situations, the artist sees economy and portability as expressions of liberation.