

MÉS ENLLÀ DE MAUTHAUSEN FRANCESC BOIX FOTÒGRAF

1 INTRODUCTION

On 5 May 1945, one of Francesc Boix's companions took a photograph of him with a camera hanging round his neck and an armband that identified him as a reporter. Just a few hours earlier Mauthausen Nazi concentration camp, where he had been deported, had been liberated by American troops. That image caught a passion and a profession that had begun in Barcelona, when he was a very young man, and would not end until his death in Paris in 1951.

With this exhibition of his career as a photographer, we are doing our duty to the memory of Francesc Boix and the Republican men and women who travelled the roads of war, the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the Second World War (1939-1945). They gave their lives and saw their dignity crushed in the slave and extermination camps of the German Third Reich and, in the case of the survivors, ended up condemned to a definitive exile or subjected to ignominious treatment by the Franco dictatorship.

2 YOUTH, CIVIL WAR AND EXILE (1920-1941)

Francesc Boix Campo was born in the Barcelona district of Poble Sec on 31 August 1920 into a Republican and Catalanist family who had ties with libertarian circles. His youth passed between conversations in the family tailor shop, studies and his first steps as an apprentice photographer, a passion he shared with his father, who had a small photographic laboratory in their house. The fascist coup carried out by General Franco in 1936 and the new winds of revolution led him, like many other young people at the time, to a growing awareness and an ideological radicalisation. He joined the Unified Socialist Youth (JSU), worked with the communist press and travelled the fronts of the Civil War to record events and encourage rearguard actions.

Boix did not see the fall of Barcelona to Franco's army in 1939 as he had left home with his military unit, and so the full weight of the repression fell on his father. Bartomeu Boix died shortly afterwards, in 1942, in the Model prison in Barcelona, but his son had already been deported to Mauthausen.

— **Photojournalism on the Aragón and Segre fronts**
From July 1936, the young Boix seized all opportunities to develop his passion for photography and to make friends, among them Teresa Pàmies and Gregorio and Joaquín López Raimundo, leading members of the JSU. First came the JSU meetings and then periodical contributions to the weekly *Juliol*, until in mid 1937, with the support of the political commissar Jaume Girabau, he joined the 143 Mixed Brigade of the 30th Division, with which he fought on the fronts in Teruel, Huesca, Balaguer, Vilanova de Meià and Vilanova de la Barca.

— **French exile and internment**

Boix was among the many soldiers and civilians who, after the defeat of the Republic, sought refuge on the other side of the Pyrenees. He was interned in the French camps at Vernet (Ariège) and Septfonds (Tarn et Garonne) until he enlisted in the 28th Company of Foreign Workers sent to the Vosges (Lorraine region in north-eastern France). There he was taken prisoner by the Germans on the night of 20 to 21 June 1940, after the collapse of the French army. The *Frontstalag* (prisoner of war camp on French territory) in Belfort, north-eastern France, and *Stalag* (prisoner of war camps in Germany) XIB in Fallingbostal, Lower Saxony, were the prelude to his road to Mauthausen camp in Austria, where he arrived on 27 January 1941.

3 CHRONOLOGY

1920 / 31 August. Born in Barcelona in the Poble Sec district, the son of Bartomeu Boix and Anna Campo. His father was a tailor and amateur photographer.

1934 / He begins his apprenticeship in photography at Casa Fotografia Industrial Romagosa in Barcelona.

1935 / He begins his political militancy in the Unified Socialist Youth (JSU), through the Casal Jove Guàrdia in Poble Sec.

1936 / 3 September. The first number of *Juliol*, the JSU magazine, appears.

1937 / 10 July. Boix publishes his photographs in the magazine *Juliol*, usually with articles about the activities of young Catalans during the war.

Mid 1937. He goes to the front as a photographic reporter, with the 143 Mixed Brigade of the 30th Division, with which he fought on the fronts in Teruel, Huesca, Balaguer, Vilanova de Meià and Vilanova de la Barca.

1938 / He works as a reporter on the Aragón and Segre fronts in the 30th Division (the old *Macià-Companys* column).

1939 / 26 January. Franco's army occupies Barcelona.

His father, Bartomeu Boix, is arrested, tried and sentenced to eight years in prison.

Francesc Boix starts on the road to exile. He is interned in the Vernet (Ariège) and Septfonds (Tarn et Garonne) camps in France.

September. From the French camps he is taken to north-eastern France with a group of Spanish Republican combatants, enlisted in the 28th Company of Foreign Workers (CTE), destined for the Vosges (Lorraine region).

1940 / 20-21 June. He is taken prisoner by the Germans and interned in *Frontstalag* 140 in Belfort, north-eastern France (prisoner of war camp on French territory).

1941 / He is moved to *Stalag* XI-B in Fallingbostal, Lower Saxony (prisoner of war camp in Germany).

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4 DEPORTATION (1941-1945)

When Boix arrived at Mauthausen, the camp already had the look of the sinister fortress the Spanish Republican deportees had to enlarge at the cost of their lives. He was forced to work on the extension until he was sent to the *Erkennungsdienst* (identification service) at the end of 1941. There he worked with Antoni Garcia from Tortosa and was later joined by José Cereceda from Madrid.

The service managers had various assistants in the photographic laboratory to record the identification of the prisoners, the events and the visits from the high-ranking Nazis, the deaths "while trying to escape", etc. Boix, who was in touch with communist circles, soon realised the possibilities of interested relations with the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, the security organisation of the German National Socialist Workers Party) to obtain favours for the Spanish and especially to gather evidence against the executioners by hiding negatives, which were smuggled out of the camp by young members of the *Poschacher* commando (the name of the quarry where they worked near the town of Mauthausen) and guarded by a woman of the town, Anna Pointner.

— Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps
The camp, built in 1938, had become an emblem of Republican deportation for the number of them that were interned there. Of the more than 7000 Republicans interned in the camp, only about 2000 managed to survive. Most of them died in the Gusen precinct, known as the “Spanish graveyard” because of the harsh working conditions and the illnesses associated with hunger and exhaustion, not forgetting the gassing of hundreds of them in Hartheim castle, the centre used for the murder of the mentally and physically sick.

— Liberation

After the liberation by American troops on 5 May Francesc Boix had a great opportunity to complete his task as a photographer. From the first day of freedom and for a month his camera captured images of the soldiers marching in, the camp installations, the interrogation of the camp commandant, Franz Ziereis, the deported companions and the repatriations of the different groups.

5 CHRONOLOGY

1941 / 27 January. He is deported to Mauthausen with 1,506 Spanish Republicans. His registration number is 5185. Like all the Republicans he is identified with a blue triangle (stateless) with the letter ‘S’ (Spanier).

End of August. He is incorporated into the Erkennungsdienst (identification service) photographic laboratory and archive.

December. He is transferred to Block 2 as he has been allocated to the Erkennungsdienst, where the prisoners known to be prominent were found. They had had access to special jobs with the camp services and received special treatment, as well as certain privileges and freedom of movement not available to the others.

1942 / 2 April. Bartomeu Boix, Francesc’s father, leaves the Model prison in Barcelona. He dies a few days later.

1943 / February. After the defeat at Stalingrad, the order comes from Berlin to leave no trace of any of the activities in the concentration and extermination camps. All photographic and filmic evidence must be destroyed. On the initiative of Francesc Boix, the negatives are taken from the photographic laboratory. A network of Republican deportees is organised to hide the material until it can be smuggled out of the camp.

1943 / At the end of this year a group of young Republicans known as *Poschacher* are sent to work in the quarry that belongs to the businessman Anton Poschacher, of the town of Mauthausen, hence the name.

1944 / October. The *Poschacher* group are sent definitively out of the camp. They are responsible for smuggling out the negatives and handing them over to Anna Poitner, a woman of the town, who guarded them until liberation.

1945 / 5 May. American troops liberate Mauthausen. From that moment, Francesc Boix works busily as a reporter, recording life in the camp.

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6 A NEW LIFE (1945-1951)

Having just arrived in Paris with thousands of photographs and negatives, Boix offered the material to different periodicals and publishers. He became an authority in terms of knowledge of Mauthausen camp, so much so that he was called as a witness at the Nuremberg and Dachau trials, which he took the opportunity of recording. Whilst he was living his new life in Paris in the company of exiled friends and families, with no possibility of entering Spain, he embarked on a fruitful professional career, which had him travelling as a reporter and recording crucial events in the political action of the Spanish Communist Party and the JSU, an activity well suited to his restless character but somewhat less so to his damaged health. Six years after returning from Mauthausen, he died on 7 July 1951 in Rothschild hospital and was buried in Thiais cemetery in Paris.

— Return to the host country

In Paris Francesc Boix, like all the other old deportees, received the friendly welcome denied him in 1939 and, thanks to his outgoing character, he made friendships that helped him embark on a new life, a busy one from the professional point of view and connected with his political militancy. Frustrated in his attempt to rejoin his sister Núria in Andorra, he won affection among the exiled Republicans, including a special relation with Joaquín López Raimundo, an old comrade in arms in the JSU and also a deportee to Mauthausen.

— Evidence at the trials of the Nazi hierarchy

His statement before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, set up to judge the crimes perpetrated by the high-ranking Nazi, was heard between 28 and 29 January 1946. His identification

of Ernst Kaltenbrunner on his visit to Mauthausen and the story of the photographs taken by the SS were crucial. Shortly afterwards, between March and April the same year, he also testified at Dachau before the American military tribunal that judged 61 criminals from Mauthausen. Once again he brought photographs as proof of “criminal conspiracy”.

— Graphic reporter

Boix the photographer became a regular reporter for the publications linked to the French Communist Party, *Regards*, *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir*, a task which took him on journeys to cover events in the Communist sphere, to meet leading personalities of the Republican exile such as Dolores Ibárruri –La Pasionaria–, Pablo Picasso or Santiago Carrillo and to be present at all the political mobilisations against the Franco dictatorship in the years when French relations with the Spanish regime were going through a difficult period.

7 CHRONOLOGY

Between 1945 and 1951 he works as a reporter in Paris for various publications, always within the sphere of the Communist Party: *Regards*, *L'Humanité*, *Ce Soir* and *El Mundo Obrero*.

1946 / 28 and 29 January. He gives evidence at the Nuremberg trials.

March-May. He gives evidence at the Dachau trials. He travels to the Cabilia region of Algeria with other reporters and journalists to do a photographic reportage.

9 February. As a reporter he attends the inauguration of the art exhibition organised by the Franco-Spanish Artistic Coordination Committee in Paris.

17 February. He covers the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the electoral victory of the Popular Front held at Salle Pleyel, Paris.

23 February. He attends the event condemning the murder of Cristino García, the Communist militant, anti-Franco guerrilla and member of the French Resistance by the Franco authorities.

9 March. He is present at the mobilisation and demonstration against the Franco dictatorship in Paris after the execution by firing squad of Cristino García.

27 March. He documents photographically the funeral of Francisco Largo Caballero, president of the Spanish government from 1936 to 1937.

1947 / 20 June - 25 July. He attends the I World Youth and Students Festival in Prague. The festival brings together more than 17,000 young people from 72 countries with the slogan “Young people, unite in the struggle for a firm and lasting peace”.

1948 / 9 June. Boix and his sister try to meet on the border between Andorra and France, but fail to do so.

July. He does the graphic reportage of the Tour de France.

1949 / 14 August. He attends the World Youth and Students Festival in Budapest. Also in Budapest the World University Summer Games are held and the great youth party of the world. The festival brings together 20,000 young people from 82 countries with the slogan “Young people, unite! Forward, for a firm peace, for democracy, the national independence of peoples and a better future!”.

1951 / 7 July. Dies at Rothschild hospital and is buried in Thiais cemetery in Paris.

8 FRANCESC BOIX, A PHOTOGRAPHER OF HIS TIME

Francesc Boix lived the revolution marked by the introduction of the 135 format in photography. The new photojournalism promoted by the imposition of this format –with the Leica system as its main tool– opened the way for a new, direct vision of reality which photographers like Boix made their own. The harsh experience of the years he lived and the profession he had practised from his youth shaped him as a photographer. But his ingenuity and an innate talent make him singular. He leaned to recount reality with a sincere and direct narration of the events.

There is not a great deal of Boix's work. He did not live long. But it is intense, direct and lived with passion. He speaks to us of what he felt to his lot. Wide awake and full of curiosity, the professional Boix is a complete “reporter”. Technically skilful, he moves effortlessly in graphic documentary. A privileged observer, in the viewfinder of his camera he frames what he regards as essential. Well composed, visually clear images make him a versatile narrator. He is objective when he needs to be –he capture what he sees– but he also becomes involved in the events and reinforces what he wants to convey ideologically with dynamic reportages, moving from the general shot to the close-up, using

diagonals, low angles... and searching for the right moment, what the new photojournalism forged in the fires of the European wars postulated: to inform without being indifferent.

Pep Parer, photographer

9 CHRONOLOGY 1933 - 1946

1933

30 January – Hitler is appointed chancellor of Germany after his party (NSDAP, German Workers National Socialist Party) wins the parliamentary elections in July 1932.

27 February – Reichstag fire (seat of the German Parliament). State of emergency that confers special powers on Hitler to persecute his political opponents.

22 March – Opening of the first concentration camp, at Dachau, where German political dissidents are interned.

1 April – First day of the boycott of Jewish businesses. Later it will affect doctors, lawyers and other liberal professions.

10 May – Beginning of the Nazi regime's intellectual censorship. Burning of books written by Jews and members of the opposition to Nazism in Bebelplatz, Berlin.

14 July – Prohibition of forming new parties in Germany. Previously, on 5 July, all existing parties except the Nazi party had been banned (NSDAP).

14 July – Passing of the law that forbids granting foreigners and Jews German nationality and the law of sterilisation of the physically and mentally handicapped.

1934

2 August – After the death of President Von Hindenburg, Hitler combines the posts of president and chancellor and becomes the sole leader (führer) of Germany.

1935

1 April – Harassment of Jehovah's witnesses begins.

15 September – Nuremberg Laws, which isolate the Jewish community from other Germans. Other countries which are allies of Germany pass similar legislations.

1936

6 June – Harsher restrictions against the Gypsies.

17 June – Heinrich Himmler is appointed Reichsführer SS, leader of the Nazi Germany elite combat group (SS).

12 July – Sachsenhausen camp, near Berlin, set up.

17-19 July – Coup d'état by part of the Spanish army led by General Franco against the Second Republic. Outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Hitler and Mussolini provide aid to the rebels.

1 August – The Summer Olympic Games are held in Berlin.

10 October – The SS create the Central Office for the struggle against homosexuality and abortion. About 15,000 German homosexuals die in the concentration camps.

1937

The "Arianisation" of the German economy begins. The Jews are forced, on baseless legal grounds, to sell their businesses, in most cases at prices well below their real value.

26 April – The Condor Legion of German aviation bombs Guernica.

15 July – Buchenwald camp in Germany set up.

1938

11-13 March – Germany annexes Austria (Anschluss) to the Third Reich.

6-15 July – Évian Conference (France). Delegates of 32 countries and representatives of refugee aid organisations deal with the immigration quotas for refugees fleeing Germany. The United States and other countries refuse to soften restrictions on immigration.

25 July – Beginning of the Battle of the Ebro, the longest and bloodiest of the Spanish Civil War, which will drag on until November.

8 August – Mauthausen camp set up in Austria.

17 August – Decree by which German Jews have to add Israel and Sara to their first names.

1 October – Occupation and annexation by Germany of the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia.

28 October – Expulsion of the Polish Jews living in Germany.

9 November – Night of Broken Glass in Germany. Thousands of Jewish businesses and synagogues are attacked and burned. About 30,000 Jews are sent to concentration camps. About 10,000 die there. In the following months about 115,000 Jews leave the country.

12 November – The decree for the exclusion of Jews from the economic life of Germany closes all the companies that belong to Jews.

1939

15 March – German occupation of Czechoslovakia.

1 April – End of the Spanish Civil War. About 500,000 Republican refugees flee to France.

15 May – Ravensbrück women's camp set up (Germany).

23 August – The governments of Germany and the Soviet Union sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact, in which they undertake to share Eastern Europe.

1 September – Germany invades Poland. Outbreak of the Second World War.

1 September – Start of the extermination programme of 70,000 German mental defectives.

3 September – Great Britain, France, India, Australia and New Zealand declare war on Germany. Internment of about 20,000 German and Austrian Jews.

1940

9 April – German invasion of Denmark and Norway.

10 May – German invasion of Holland, Belgium and France.

20 May – Auschwitz I concentration camp (Poland) set up.

10 June – Italy enters the war on Germany's side.

22 June – Signing of the armistice between Germany and France. The north of the country is occupied by the German army, the regions of Alsace and Lorraine are annexed to the Third Reich and the south remains unoccupied under the leadership of Marshal Pétain. The capital moves to Vichy. Vichy France collaborates actively with the Germans.

13 August – Start of the Battle of Britain. The German bombings do not achieve a British surrender.

6 August – Arrival of the first 398 Spanish Republicans at Mauthausen.

13 September – Meeting in Berlin between the Spanish foreign minister Ramón Serrano Súñer and Adolf Hitler.

27 September – Germany, Italy and Japan sign the Tripartite Pact in Berlin constituting the Axis army.

12 October – The Warsaw Ghetto with a population of about 350,000 persons, 30% of the inhabitants of the city, is set up.

23 October – Hitler and Franco meet in Hendaye. The head of the SS Himmler visits Barcelona.

1941

6 April – German invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia.

22 June – German invasion of the Soviet Union. During this year and the next hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews are shot and dumped in common graves by the SS.

31 July – Reinhard Heydrich, head of the of German security forces, starts preparations for Operation Reinhard, the code name the Nazis gave to the plan to murder the Polish Jews and responsible for the extermination of 1,700,000 of them.

18 August – Drancy becomes the internment camp for the Jews arrested in France.

15 October – Building of the first extermination camp at Belzec (Poland), which comes into definitive operation on 17 March 1942.

3 September – First experimental gassing with Zyklon B at Auschwitz. The victims are Soviet prisoners of war.

October – Majdanec camp set up for Polish prisoners of war. It is turned into a concentration camp in February 1943.

October – Start of the building of Auschwitz II (Auschwitz-Birkenau) extermination camp.

24 November – Theresienstadt concentration camp (Czechoslovakia) set up.

6 December – Soviet counteroffensive in the Battle of Moscow. The Nazis' expansion plans are halted.

7 December – Japanese attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor (Hawaii). The United States enter the war on the side of the Allies.

8 December – Start of extermination operations using gas at Chelmno camp (Poland).

11 December – Germany declares war on the United States.

1942

20 January – Wannsee Conference (Germany), at which various German ministries and agencies coordinate to implement the “Final Solution” to the Jewish question in Europe.

1 March – The Auschwitz gas chambers come into operation.

7 March – First mass deportation of Jews to Belzec camp, the largest of the whole Operation Reinhard. About 435,000 Jews were gassed between 17 March and 31 December that year.

27 March – Departure of the first convoy from Drancy to Auschwitz.

April – Sobibor extermination camp (Poland) comes into operation.

4 June – American victory at Midway. The avalanche of Japanese victories is halted.

11 June – Auschwitz III (Auschwitz-Monowitz) set up. The IG Farben company is installed.

28 June – German summer offensive against the Caucasus and Stalingrad.

4 July – Start of mass gassing of Jews at Auschwitz II.

16 July – Round-up at the Vélodrome d'Hiver in Paris, which ends in 12,884 arrests.

22 July – Mass deportation of 260,000 Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka II, where the mass gassing operations begins the next day.

4 November – End of the Battle of El Alamein. Germans and Italians are expelled from Egypt by the British and retreat to Tunisia.

8 November – Anglo-American landing in North Africa.

11 November – The German army invades the unoccupied zone of France and seals off the Pyrenees.

19 November – Beginning of the Soviet winter counteroffensive at Stalingrad. The German Sixth Army is surrounded.

1943

2 February – The German Sixth Army surrenders at Stalingrad.

13 May – The German and Italian forces surrender in Tunisia.

19 April – Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The last 70,000 Jews of the city are exterminated.

16 July – End of the Battle of Kursk, the last major German offensive on the Eastern Front.

3 September – Allied invasion of Italy.

8 September – Official surrender of Italy to the Allies. The Germans deport the Italian Jews.

1944

19 March – German occupation of Hungary.

15 May – Mass deportation of Hungarian Jews begins.

6 June – Allied landing in Normandy (France).

22 June – Start of a major Soviet summer offensive that expels the Germans from the Soviet Union and reaches the gates of Warsaw. Forced evacuations of the camps, known as the “Death Marches”, begin.

23 August – Liberation of Drancy internment camp.

25 August – Liberation of Paris.

2 October – Warsaw uprising against the Germans. 250,000 Poles die and the city is razed to the ground.

19 October – Attempted invasion of the Val d'Aran by a group of communist guerrillas with the aim, as part of the so-called “Operation Reconquest”, of advancing south and overthrowing the Franco regime. The operation fails and the Maquis have to return to France.

1945

27 January – Liberation of Auschwitz by Soviet forces.

29 April – The Americans liberate Dachau.

30 April – Adolf Hitler commits suicide in his bunker in Berlin.

30 April – Soviet troops liberate Ravensbrück.

5 May – Liberation of Mauthausen by American forces.

8 May – Official surrender of Germany.

2 September – Official surrender of Japan. Officially that is the end of the Second World War.

20 November – The International Military Tribunal, made up of judges from the United States, England, France and Russia, is set up. The trial of 22 high-ranking Nazis begins in the city of Nuremberg.

1946

28 and 29 January – The photographer Francesc Boix makes a statement at the Nuremberg trials. Photographs stolen by the Republicans deported to Mauthausen are submitted as proof against some of the Nazi officials, who are condemned for crimes against humanity and sentenced to death.