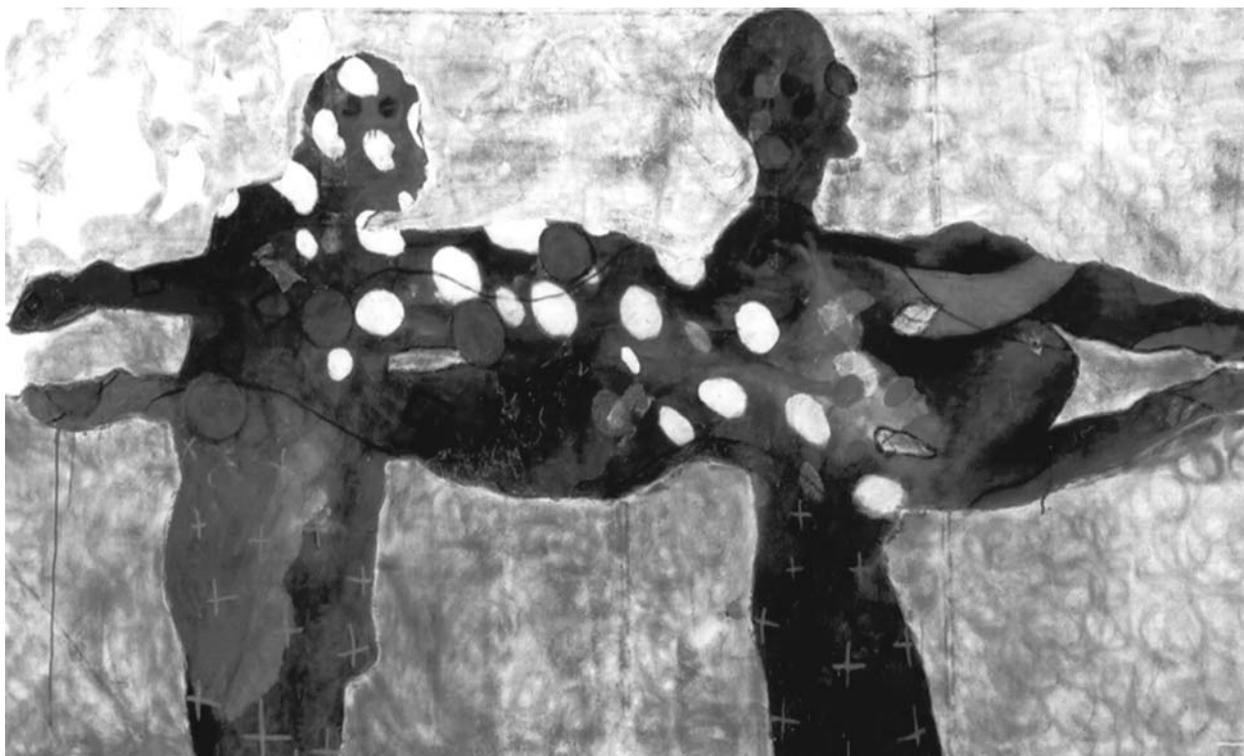


## Baggage

by Sean Thomas Dougherty

Great brown trunks with metal buckles, belts, train trunks, black leather and steel rivets, large round stamps: Austria, Munich, Bremen, Budapest. Piles of trunks and suitcases to the ceiling. Rooms of suitcases, bird-cages, baskets. Rooms of shoes. Ellis Island, JFK, Dachau. Rooms of trinkets, gold foiled flowers, laces, gloves, hats, crumpled shifts, teeth. Bones. Buckled shoes. “It was the buckled shoes that haunted me most,” my friend says of the camps. A shoe on the side of the road. Shoes. We walk in shoes. When we die, it is our feet who wear our soles. “Let no angel carry me the last few feet to heaven, bury me in brand new soles,” go the old blues, the deep blues. I’m humming this waiting by baggage claim, touch down in Budapest, carrying in my head the image of those great halls of Ellis Island and the wall of suitcases stacked upon each ship’s arrival. The loudspeaker in three languages. The German tourists gathering up their ski poles. Heather has her eyes half closed by a phone booth. She is sleepy in blue jeans and sweatshirt. I wonder what Regina wore as she stepped off of the George Washington? What was the weather like that September day in 1912? I read somewhere that weather is the carrier of memory, the bringer of scent, smell, the deep body memories that Proust wrote of—bite the Madeleine and your childhood returns, your aunt brewing tea in the kitchen. The smell of cornbread and your grandmother with a babushka or bandanna around her braided hair. I had a student with a chivalrous name—Dustin Chevalier—a sweet quiet kid who wrote me an essay once about “the first smell of autumn along the lake.” The changing leaves, the rain. “It is when I return to the before,” he wrote, never having read Elie Wiesel. When questioned about the time before the camps Wiesel answered, “Of course there is a before.” And when asked “Why does one return to the before?” he answered, “To eat.”



*Connection, Rodrigo Hernandez*