

## **Rita Bakacs**

### **Artist Statement**

Rita Bakacs takes us to the European origins of many North American Jews. In the summer of 2009, curator Cyril Reade proposed that she visit the Schloss Börnicke, a former residence of the Mendelssohn-Bartholdy family outside Bernau, a town northeast of Berlin, in the former German Democratic Republic. Bakacs has produced this new video work that explores the estate, now in early stages of restoration, magnificent even in its neglected condition. Acquired by Ernst von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in 1892 and redesigned by the modernist architect Bruno Paul for Ernst's son Paul in 1910, the villa hosted cultural soirées in its spacious rooms overlooking the park-like setting. This history is representative of one of the ways in which German Jewry had come to participate in European culture since the publication of the eighteenth-century philosophical work and the living example of their ancestor, Moses Mendelssohn, who had provided a rationale for cultural assimilation and religious tolerance. During the bombings of Berlin in World War II, the castle served as a refuge for the Swiss embassy; following the war, it was first a Soviet military hospital, then a vacation home for young German communists, and finally a home for physically disabled children. Closed in 1992, the building was left to gradually decay. Bakacs' camera records the villa's current crumbling state and its environs, echoing the past, resounding with the sometimes forced, sometimes voluntary migration of peoples and the ensuing transitions of neighbourhoods.