Pictorial Evidence of Ruins: From Rome to Homs (Rome, 14–15 Nov 19)

Rome, Nov 14–15, 2019

Mateusz Kapustka

The Pictorial Evidence of Ruins: From Rome to Homs

International Conference
Istituto Svizzero di Roma / Academia Belgica / Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History

The questions of ruins and their images oscillate in the history of art between the vanitative interpretations related to the early modern period and the aesthetic categories of romanticism, while for the cultural studies the theoretical reflection on the ambiguities of memory and oblivion stands in the foreground. The conference goes beyond this topic range and raises questions about the importance of a ruin as an anachronistic symbol, a visual indicator of historical difference, and a critical touchstone of modernity.

How did ruins turn into an independent figurative metaphor regarded as the epitome of transience? To what extent were the ancient Roman ruins transformed in the early modern period into iconic images of symbolic and aesthetic value and what is the relevance of this long process of transference — the elevation of the ruin to a sovereign image — for the way in which we view today's Syrian war ruins from a distance? In this context, one needs to differentiate between natural disintegration and planned ruination: what distinguishes the archaeological from the iconoclastic dimension of a ruin?

The instrumentalization of the ruins of Palmyra which themselves became victim to a media-related iconoclasm in 2015 and the elevation of their void space after devastation into a social icon give reason to think critically about how the reception of ruins and the depiction of ruination combine anachronism with aesthetics and affect. Following these issues, we shall ask: What is the pictorial evidence of ruins and that of their images? In how far can images of ruins iconically convey or translate the nature of a catastrophe? To what extent does the aesthetic familiarity of the ruins of Rome as a visual paradigm of a ruined city raised by art since the 16th century contribute to our understanding of the new media-related impact of factual destruction today? Does aesthetics have an anaesthetic effect in this case?

With these questions, the conference seeks to contribute to the critical analysis of a pictorial concept of ruins from the early modern period to the present — spanned between destruction, restoration, and construction — and to ask how the issue of the media topicality of ruins can be dealt with today.

Program:

Thursday, November 14, 2019
Afternoon session (Istituto Svizzero di Roma, Via Ludovisi 48, Rome):

15.00-15.15 – Welcome
Adrian Brändli (Istituto Svizzero di Roma))

Chair: Ralph Dekoninck (Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve)

15.15-15.45 – Mateusz Kapustka (University of Zurich/FU Berlin):
Ruins, Ruination, and Anachronism. An Introduction

15.45-16.30 – Henri de Riedmatten (University of Geneva):
Recoding Fragmented Figures: Dynamics of Restoration in Early Sixteenth-Century Rome

16.30-17.00 – Coffee break

Chair: Tatjana Bartsch (Bibliotheca Hertziana)

17.00-17.45 – Jumana Al Asaad (University of Heidelberg):
The Iconization and Medialisation of the Syrian Cultural Heritage in the Ongoing Armed Conflict

Friday, November 15, 2019
Morning session (Academia Belgica, Via Omero 8, Rome):

9.00-9.15 – Welcome
Sabine van Sprang (Academia Belgica)

Chair: Barbara Baert (KU Leuven)

9.15-10.00 – Maarten Delbeke (ETH Zurich):
Getting Rid of the Ruins. Remnants as Sources of Knowledge and Confusion in the Late 17th Century

10.00-10.45 – Dirk De Meyer (Ghent University):
Palmyra to Europe and back. Architectural Ruins and their Mediatization

10.45-11.15 – Coffee break

Chair: Tristan Weddigen (Bibliotheca Hertziana)

11.15-12.00 – Stanislaus von Moos (University of Zurich/Getty Research Institute):
Constructivist Ruins? On Frank Lloyd Wright and Peter Blume

12.00-13.00 – Lunch break

13.00-13.45 – Robert Harbison (London):
Ruins and Fragments in Modern Sculpture

13.45-14.15 – Concluding remarks and discussion

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