

## Photography and the Unrepresentable

Colchester, United Kingdom, May 15, 2012

Deadline: Feb 16, 2012

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Photography and the Unrepresentable:

A History of Photographic (Mis)representation

A One-Day Art History Graduate Conference at University of Essex

15 May 2012, Colchester, United Kingdom

Keynote speaker: TBA

### CALL FOR PAPERS

The Department of Art History and Theory at the University of Essex is pleased to be accepting contributions for the first Art History Graduate Conference to be held within the School of Philosophy and Art History (SPAH). Graduate students from MA or PhD programmes are invited to submit paper abstracts on the theme of Photography and the Unrepresentable. The conference is an opportunity to take part in the first interdisciplinary conference within the department and to meet other graduate students engaged in the study of photography, art theory and philosophy.

Photographic representation is historically partial, fragmented and suspect of manipulation. After World War II, the ethical implications of representation became a primary concern, while the very possibility of representation of traumatic events was questioned by theorists and artists alike. More recently work by Georges Didi-Huberman (*Images in Spite of All*, 2003; trans. 2007), Jean-Luc Nancy (*The Ground of the Image*, 2003; 2005) and Jacques Rancière (*The Future of the Image*, 2003; 2007) have each subjected art historical narratives of the photographic image to a critique of the notion of representation itself. We are particularly interested in extending such questions about the impossibility (or taboo) of representation to open a discussion on how the links between photography, trauma and historical memory can be re-examined.

As is the case for Didi-Huberman's reflections on the representation of the Holocaust in his *Images in Spite of All*, photography perhaps best functions as a discursive site in which either the idea of the unrepresentable emerges as self-evident or its fictitious nature simultaneously manifests, hides, and collapses. Questions arising from this include: What does the notion of the unrepresentable do to assumptions of photographic truth? What might the unrepresentable look like? Is there a representational impossibility specific to photography? When photography is requested to perform "adequate representation," how and in what context does the request become justifiable?

This conference aims not only at interrogating contradictions and arbitrariness inherent in the idea of the unrepresentable, but also at opening up new perspectives on the relationship between

photography and the unrepresentable in artistic, cultural and social practices today. Contributions might also focus on issues of censorship, the role of chance and the impact of digitalization as recurrent themes in a history of photographic (mis) representation.

We invite submissions from graduate students from all disciplines, on topics that may include, but are not limited to:

- The unrepresentable and the unimaginable
- The aporia of representation: impossibility or interdiction?
- Photography and the representation of catastrophe
- Montage and historical imagination
- Can photography represent thought? (In particular challenging Michael Fried's recent writing on states of absorption in contemporary photography)
- Can digital images be linked to trauma in the same way that analogue (indexical) ones are?
- Photography and mourning: voice, memory and myth
- Representation and photographic truth · Artists who take the photographic apparatus as the subject of their work. (e.g., Marcel Duchamp, Gerhard Richter, Robert Smithson and Tacita Dean)
- Links between photographic authenticity and transparency in modernist architecture

Please send 300-word abstracts of 20 minute-papers accompanied by a short CV to [artpgconf@essex.ac.uk](mailto:artpgconf@essex.ac.uk) by 30 January 2012. Successful submissions will be notified by the end of February.

Selected conference proceedings will be published in a special issue of *rebus*, the department's online journal of Art History and Theory.

Please send any other inquiries to [artpgconf@essex.ac.uk](mailto:artpgconf@essex.ac.uk).

Conference Organizing Committee:

Aline Guillermet (PhD candidate in Art History)

Hugh Govan (PhD candidate in Art History)

Taisuke Edamura (PhD candidate in Art History)

Reference:

CFP: Photography and the Unrepresentable. In: ArtHist.net, Dec 16, 2011 (accessed May 13, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/2422>>.