

Witness, Recover, Persist: Practicing Survival (St. Louis, 25–26 Feb 22)

Online / Washington University in St. Louis, Feb 25–26, 2022

Deadline: Dec 1, 2021

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Witness | Recover | Persist:

Practicing Survival in Global Art History

Fourth Biennial Graduate Student Art History Symposium

Washington University in St. Louis

February 25-26, 2022

“Art is a way of survival.”

—Yoko Ono

“[Waywardness] is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive.”

—Saidiya Hartman

From the earliest known artworks to the practices of the present, themes of survival and persistence mark important terrain for artists and art historians. Art can confront the finality of death but also challenge that finality, carrying traces of individual and cultural life from generation to generation. Art can exhume and reanimate histories and cultures presumed dead. Some art finds its life in its own dissolution or finds its place in history erased; other work becomes itself in the museum collection or the archive, where its preservation can make – or manipulate – the stories told about worlds past. As art historians, material culturists, archaeologists, and artists, we turn to surviving objects of culture to make sense of the world as it was, is, and can be.

The COVID-19 pandemic only intensifies the need for collective reflection on matters of loss and survival. In response to worldwide shifts in priority and inquiry, this symposium will explore practices, processes, and representations of survival, broadly conceived. Proposals may consider objects or images which historicize triumph over forces of harm, oppression, illness, or death. So, too, they may examine the ways in which art can expose the limitations of “survival” as a measure of fulfillment in life or recognition by society. Art as a medium of grief is welcome intellectual terrain for the symposium, as are considerations on the art and rhetoric of “survivor” and “survival” important to conversations around sexual violence. Papers can explore topics related to the survival of animals, the environment, and inanimate things. In addition, we welcome papers on archival and conservation concerns, or on the lack thereof, in cases of works lost, destroyed, or intentionally ephemeral. All those invested in art as survival or in the survival of art are invited to participate.

We seek submissions across chronological, geographic, cultural, and disciplinary areas. Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

Artistic Practice and Theory

- Art, and illness, medicine, biopolitics
- Ecocriticism and eco-art
- Art in the time of COVID-19
- Aesthetic refusals of death or destruction
- Artistic redress of sexual violence
- Art and grief, loss, and/or trauma
- Duration and ephemerality in art and performance practices

Methods and Museum Practices

- Archaeological methods
- Fragmented histories and trace remains
- Preserving art at risk due to conflict, urban sprawl, climate change, and/or other factors
- Conservation and object maintenance and the ethics thereof
- Artistic rediscovery, revivals, "new life"
- Archival and documentary practices

What's Next?

- Survival in the face of political, social, economic, and environmental adversity, including adversity within art history and related disciplines
- Limits of survival, survival as a starting place

The symposium takes a hybrid model in 2022, and we welcome papers from those able to present in-person or from those interested in virtual modalities. Current graduate students are invited to submit a CV and 250-word abstract with a working title for a 20-minute paper by December 1, 2021. To apply please complete this Google Form (<https://forms.gle/s8MaeaZyVxaaBpJg9>).

Please send any questions to GSAHS@wustl.edu.

Further information may be found at <https://sites.wustl.edu/gsaHS/>. All proposals will receive a response by late-December.

Reference:

CFP: Witness, Recover, Persist: Practicing Survival (St. Louis, 25-26 Feb 22). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 16, 2021 (accessed Sep 16, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/35099>>.