

Perpetual Upkeep (Urbana/Champaign, 4-5 Apr 24)

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Apr 4-05, 2024

Deadline: Jan 22, 2024

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Deadline Extended: January 22, 2024

Graduate Art History Student Symposium "Perpetual Upkeep: Intersections of Art and Maintenance".

Keynote speaker: Dr. Deanna Ledezma (Inter-University Program for Latino Research/University of Illinois Chicago Mellon Program).

The symposium "Perpetual Upkeep" interrogates the relationship of art and maintenance, including artworks and practices that make visible the upkeep of dominant power structures and the technologies on which they rely.

The theme of upkeep and maintenance considers how infrastructures continuously maintain existing structures of power, and how the crises of today have their structural foundations in the past. In effect, "Perpetual Upkeep" positions crises not as unprecedented disruptions and catastrophes, but the effects of planned systems, their maintenance, or, conversely, abandonment, and targeted destruction. For example, the Russian invasion of Ukraine brings into focus the integral role of civil infrastructure, which became the target of military attacks in the ongoing process of destroying and redefining borders. This invasion also continues long-lasting colonial politics that, in addition to annexation of lands and redefinition of borders, includes strategies of resource extraction and cultural erasure.

Thinking with Max Liboiron's (Red River Métis/Michif and settler raised in Lac la Biche) "Pollution is Colonialism," which gives accounts of anticolonial strategies in research, this symposium seeks projects that look at "the bones of colonialism" in the past and present as pieces in an ongoing process, and as a "set of specific, structured, interlocking, and overlapping relations." What do infrastructures of colonialism look/feel/sound like and what resources do they require? How do relationships that uphold such structures materialize? How do researchers (who occupy stolen land) responsibly attend to the bones of colonialism without maintaining them?

Acts of maintenance often remain invisible but are never neutral, upholding oppressive and totalizing structures of power. On the other hand, such acts are sometimes necessary for sustaining physical bodies and communities. How, then, might we expand our discussion of maintenance to include routines of care and alternative ways of living? Or, as Mierle Laderman Ukeles queries in her 1969 manifesto for Maintenance Art:

"[A]fter the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?"

The symposium encourages participation from current and recent graduate students across the humanities whose research or art practices interrogate relationships between art and maintenance. While art historical inquiry privileges visual media, research in sound and other sensory studies is particularly welcomed.

Papers that engage with the following topics and issues are especially encouraged:

- biopolitics, borders, and nation-building
- queer maintenance (including identity, bodies, and communities)
- dark economies and undervalued labor
- land and non-human actors entangled in human-made structures
- counter-maintenance initiatives, destruction, and the avant-garde
- ephemeral oppositions to permanent systems
- breakdowns of maintenance

Please submit abstracts (250-300 words) and a 2-page CV to the review committee at arthsymposium.uiuc@gmail.com by January 22, 2024. Presenters will be notified in late January.

Reference:

CFP: Perpetual Upkeep (Urbana/Champaign, 4-5 Apr 24). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 21, 2023 (accessed May 10, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/40666>>.