

## Absence as artistic strategy in contemporary art (Leiden, 11 Jun 25)

Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society, department of Art History - Leiden,  
The Netherlands, Jun 11, 2025

Deadline: Mar 24, 2025

Laura Bertens, LUCAS Leiden University

The symposium is organized as a starting point for the publication of an edited volume – a selection of symposium attendants will be invited to submit book chapters.

Organizers: Paula Harvey, Felipe Martinez, Stephanie Noach, Laura Bertens.

We invite abstracts for papers focused on the theme of absence in contemporary art. The subject can be understood very broadly, including art that erases, leaves things out, emphatically hides things, highlights negative space, refuses to close a narrative arc, suggests a presence that is not there, overrepresents something to the point of making it invisible, etcetera. Papers should analyse contemporary artworks that incorporate some form of absence as a key artistic strategy. Please note, we do not seek analyses of artworks that are merely about absence, i.e. only in terms of their meaning or context; absence must be a fundamental aspect of the work itself. Some examples are Rachel Whiteread's casts, Hiroshi Sugimoto's theatre series, Doris Salcedo's *Atrabiliarios*, Gillian Wearing's *Trauma*, Ger van Elk's *Missing Persons* series, Song Dong's *Writing Diary with Water* and Christian Boltanski's monument installations.

We welcome a broad range of theoretical approaches, with a preference for art theoretical analysis. The focus is on artworks from the 1980's onwards. We are hoping for contributions from authors and artist researchers around the globe. If you have an idea that does not entirely fit the described criteria but feels relevant nonetheless, please send us an email to discuss it with us!

How to submit: please submit an abstract of max. 500 words to [absence.in.art@gmail.com](mailto:absence.in.art@gmail.com) by March the 24th. You will receive a response by the beginning of April. Please attach an author bio of 100-150 words and include your institutional affiliation, country of residence, and email address. We aim to organize the symposium as an in-person event but will make it possible to attend online for those who cannot come. We are committed to reducing the carbon footprint of academia and fully support (and encourage) decisions not to fly to academic events. If you have any questions, please contact Laura Bertens at [l.m.f.bertens@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:l.m.f.bertens@hum.leidenuniv.nl).

Reference:

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