Ruin/Ruination (Chicago, 7 Mar 26)

Chicago/IL, Mar 07, 2026
Deadline: Dec 1, 2025

UIC Grad Symposium Committee

The Department of Art History at University of Illinois at Chicago invites graduate students to submit paper proposals for the 2025-2026 Graduate Symposium titled Ruin/Ruination.

This symposium invites conversation about the themes of ruin and ruination. Drawing from the work of Ann Laura Stoler, we might distinguish the ruin as the image of destruction or radical transformation, and ruination as the ongoing processes of damage and decay that bring it about. While representing something permanently altered, it can also be generative, prompting new forms of meaning, purpose, resistance, or renewal. These concepts lend themselves to both static and dynamic interpretations, as well as to positive or negative ideas of what is considered "ruined," inspiring several lines of inquiry.

Key questions include: What do we choose to preserve, abandon, resurrect, or reconstruct, and why? Is ruination inevitable, and is it always destructive? Who is implicated in the ruination(s) occurring across disciplines in the humanities? How can art and visual culture help imagine positive and transformative futures? Art history, visual culture, and material studies offer rich ground for exploring these tensions. While art history often beckons a look towards the past, ruination is ongoing, producing new images, objects, and absences. One might consider the Greek Acropolis, for example, whose ruins have become a site of continuous myth-making in the context of contending claims to ownership. At the same time, these tensions extend beyond monuments and material ruins. They also appear in the artistic practices that collapse temporal, political, and technological boundaries. In postwar Mexico, Lola Álvarez Bravo's photomontages explore national identity through the collapse of the past and present. Likewise, contemporary digital artworks by LA-based artist Laura Lee McCarthy confront technology as both a site of progress and the disintegration of truth facilitated by human connection. In this way, ruin and ruination form a set of dialectic tensions: destruction and creation, memory and forgetting, history and futurity.

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Shannon Lee Dawdy, University of Chicago

Possible topics of interest include but are not limited to the following:
- Architectural and monumental remains
- Archival absences and erasures
- Art intended for the purpose of recovery
- Digital decay
- Environmental collapse
- Ethical concerns in heritage studies

- Iconoclasm
- Imperial and neo-colonial endeavors
- Nostalgia and memory
- Scenes of breakage
- The vanishing of materials and objects
- Turns towards new materialism

Submission Guidelines:
We invite proposals for 20-minute, in-person presentations that explore the theme of Ruin/Ruination. Topics are not limited by location nor timeframe, and broad interpretations are encouraged. Abstracts should be no more than 300 words and should be submitted by December 1st, 2025 to icarthistorysymposium@gmail.com, along with a current CV (no more than 2 pages). Selected applicants will be notified by early January.

Reference:
CFP: Ruin/Ruination (Chicago, 7 Mar 26). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 9, 2025 (accessed Nov 18, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51099>.