

Art/Art History in Times of Crisis (Champaign, 29–30 Oct 26)

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Oct 29–30, 2026

Deadline: Jun 1, 2026

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Graduate Art History Student Symposium.

How have artists responded to crises? How has the field of art history? And what can we, who live in a world that is subsumed by innumerable crises, learn by studying artistic and art historical responses to crisis? Pressure is exerted on our institutions, curriculum, faculty, with enrollment in the humanities falling. Domestically, the state acts violently against those who oppose it. Internationally, wars rage and post-war structures are collapsing. On top of all these issues, anthropogenic climate change is bearing down on all.

Art/Art History in Times of Crisis seeks contributions by graduate students in the field of art history and beyond which explore the ways in which both artists and art historians have responded to past turmoil. How, for instance, have works of art been shaped by – and how do they shape our responses to – crisis? Were the stylistic developments of mid-fourteenth- and early sixteenth-century Florentine art shaped by plague and war, as some scholars have argued? What does Thomas Cole's *Course of Empire* have to say about the future of American imperialism? How does Rebecca Moss's *International Waters*, filmed on an anchored cargo ship, elucidate the networks of exploitation which construct our world?

And how has—and how should—the discipline of art history respond to crisis? What is the history and indeed the fate of Marxist-inspired approaches to art historical analysis? In what ways have the various 'turns' that the field has undergone in the past fifty years addressed or failed to address the profound social, technological, political, and ecological turmoil? What can we learn from the emergence of new epistemological models—including those from the Global South? And, most crucially, does art history contribute to crises (e.g. maintaining older epistemologies or complying with authoritarian demands), or is there potential for art historians and critics to address the issues perpetuated by academia? Are we obliged to address ideology, politics, exploitation or not? Is our field suited to address the precarities of our academic, governmental, and global institutions? How do we extend art history ever more and create stronger infrastructures of knowledge and care?

We encourage graduate students in art history and beyond to think on these issues and contribute their abstracts on topics relating to Art/Art History in Times of Crisis. Papers that engage with the following topics and issues are especially encouraged:

- Memory studies

- Decolonial and neocolonial studies
- Ecology and climate change
- ☒- Imperialism, borders, and nation-building
- ☒- Crises surrounding biopolitics (queer identities, bodies, and communities)
- ☒Dark economies and undervalued labor
- ☒- State projections onto individual culture
- ☒- Epistemic justice
- Violence in art (across time periods)

Please submit an abstract (250-300 words) and a CV to the review committee at <https://bit.ly/ArtandCrisis> by June 1.

Presenters will be notified by June 30.

Questions? Email arthsymposium.uiuc@gmail.com

Reference:

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