Destruction in American Art (London, 5-6 Jun 15)

The Courtauld Institute, London, Jun 5–06, 2015
Deadline: Feb 15, 2015

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Crash and Burn: Destruction in American Art

Friday 5 - Saturday 6 June 2015
The Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN

Destruction has long occupied a central position in the construction of an American national image. From Cotton Mather's description of Boston as 'the City of Destruction' to the 9/11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina, the sheer visual force of destruction has repeatedly left an indelible mark on the collective psyche. As historians such as Richard Slotkin and Kevin Rozario have demonstrated, violent and destructive episodes have been inextricably linked with the apparently opposing forces of creation and regeneration so central to American self-imaging. This symposium will elaborate on such historical accounts to examine how the idea of destruction has shaped and been shaped by American art and visual culture.

Whether through the kind of dramatic cataclysm predicted in Thomas Cole's The Course of Empire, or the ruined aftermath captured by the post-industrial landscapes of photographer Lewis Baltz, images of destruction in American art have often engaged with the most pressing historical questions of their time. Intensifying the paradoxes between artistic creation and destruction, American art has sometimes been directly engaged in the destructive act itself. As the recent ground-breaking exhibition 'Damage Control: Art and Destruction Since 1950' made clear, the efforts of conceptual artists to incorporate destruction as an artistic technique not only threatened to destroy the art object, but offered a powerful comment on contemporary social phenomena including urban renewal and ecological devastation. The capacity of artworks from earlier periods to embody such social and environmental concerns is a subject that merits increased scholarly attention.

The symposium will attempt to establish a genealogy for the destructive impulse as it was specifically activated in American art, charting its evolution from the colonial era to the present. How do American artists reconcile destruction with their own processes of creation? What motivated artists to incorporate destruction into their art, and how have these contextual meanings changed over time? The symposium will interrogate destruction as a theme addressed by artists through their work, but also consider those external forces that have seen the artwork itself subjected to the forces of destruction. Papers can consider works of art of all mediums and periods, as well as a wider range of visual and material culture.

Submission process: Please submit abstracts of 150-200 words in English, along with a short biography of approximately 100 words to destructionsymposium@gmail.com by 15 February 2015.

Speakers and attendees alike will be invited to submit proposals to present further work in a related workshop to be held at Tate later in 2015, as part of their Refiguring American Art initiative.

Organised by Hélène Valance, Terra Foundation for American Art Postdoctoral Fellow, The Courtauld Institute of Art, and Alex J. Taylor, Terra Foundation Research Fellow in American Art, Tate

For further information about the Terra Foundation for American Art see www.terraamericanart.org

Reference:
CFP: Destruction in American Art (London, 5-6 Jun 15). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 18, 2014 (accessed Nov 8, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/9132>.