

Call for papers

Destroying

2018-2 (December) issue

The next issue of *Perspective: actualité en histoire de l'art* will focus on the theme of “destroying”. We aim to open our exploration to all the fields concerned by this notion that transcends geographical, historical and cultural boundaries. The choice of the gerund rather than the noun intensifies the value of the gesture itself – giving primacy to the action over the result – and refers to related notions such as iconoclasm or vandalism. “Destroying” raises more generally the question of the artwork’s inscription in the *polis*, the impact of its presence and the interactions it generates with the public, while drawing the outlines of our own relationship to art. From the image to the object, the artwork is questioned in terms of its symbolic value but also in its materiality, in its density.

Attacks against cultural heritage lead us to examine the perpetrators of these “crimes” in an investigation that, drawing on sociology, psychology or even law, goes beyond the field of art history. Recent massive and mediatized destructions of World Heritage symbols such as the Bamyán Buddhas in 2001 or, more recently, the Temple of Bel in Palmyra, form part of a long history of iconoclasm. From Jewish monotheism to the iconoclastic debates (from the Byzantine Empire to the Reformation) and the destruction of pre-Columbian idols by the conquistadors, the rejection of images is a symptom of crises in which politics and religion are inextricably linked.

During the inter-war period, at the time when Auguste Perret wrote: “Architecture is what makes beautiful ruins”, Albert Speer sketched his “theory of the value of ruins” according to which the quality of a building was demonstrated by its remains – a postulate that Hitler adopted and more pointedly renamed the “law of ruins”. If the war and, with it, fragmentation – physical and psychic, of beings as well as things – figures at the center of this theme, the latter cannot be reduced to the violence of annihilation. Indeed, destruction can only be understood in its dialectical relationship to construction: what the economist Joseph Schumpeter described with the expression “creative destruction,” intended to qualify the internal dynamics of the economic fabric made of simultaneous creations/disappearances in different sectors of activity within the economy. From a biological point of view, every living organism carries within it its own destruction, as the physiologist Claude Bernard expressed with this lapidary formula: “Life is death.” In this sense, the growing propensity for preservation – inherent in the concept of heritage that goes back to the French Revolution – represents a brake on this symbiotic dynamic.

In the field of art, destruction concerns both the reception and the creation of artwork and in the latter case, appears as a symbol of modernity. When Nicolas Poussin accused Caravaggio of having come into the world to “destroy painting,” he reproached his older contemporary for privileging the truth of nature to the nobility of subjects. When, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the pioneers of abstraction proceeded to destroy natural forms, it was in the hope of revealing their concealed essence. In spite of everything that distinguishes them – that is, opposes them – destroying consisted in both cases of an unveiling aimed at grasping the “essence of the object” for the former, and a spiritual reality for the latter.

This call for papers aims to elicit proposals exploring the proposed topic in its broadest range, from monuments and architectural ensembles (Communist monuments, etc.), to images (religious icons, etc.), objects (ready-mades, Jean Tinguely's self-destroying machines, etc.), even performances (Arman's "Angers", etc.). The topics will take into account the phenomena of intentional "degradation" (graffiti, etc.) and will extend to the aesthetic judgment of works (discredit, etc.), to acts of reconstruction or deconstruction to which they may be subject (destructive restoration, melting of statues and gold artifacts or the unraveling of tapestries, in order to reuse materials such as bronze, silver or gold, etc.), or even to construction techniques through the negative (act of erasing, for example). These different ideas are only illustrative. All proposals are welcome, though *Perspective* wishes to privilege diachronic studies whose forms and stakes can be multiple. Proposals may range from a synthetic article highlighting a particular point within the theme (25,000 characters) to a historiographical assessment of a geographical territory, a singular figure, or even a given historical period (45,000 characters). Since *Perspective* will take care of translations, all projects will be examined by the editorial board, regardless of the language of submission.

Please send your proposals (a summary of 2,000 to 3,000 characters and a 2 to 3-line biography) to the editorial team (revue-perspective@inha.fr) before **Monday, November 27, 2017**. Authors of selected articles will be informed of the editorial board's decision before the end of the year. Articles will need to be submitted by June 15, 2018 for publication in December 2018.

The editorial board of *Perspective: actualité en histoire de l'art*

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