

Displacement Displaced: Drawing on the Past

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Topic:

In recognition of the sheer quantity of cultural heritage that has been damaged or destroyed since the year 2000, this presentation will discuss the factors contributing to, and driving some the forces of destruction. Arguments for preservation that revolve around material culture as the physical manifestation of an ongoing cultural conversation will be presented from the point of view of a practicing artist who has been drawing 12th century buildings for the past twenty years.

Scope:

To explore this topic, the presentation will be grounded in a discussion of the tensions between the preservation minded, art historical, globalist view, which remains convinced of the importance of saving the world's material culture, in contrast to a range of views that foreground regional and local concerns, which is not particularly interested in, or even actively opposes the preservation of a wide range of material from the past. This presentation will explore the historical roots of conflicting points of view, using John Ruskin and Walter Benjamin to ground a Romantic preservationist view that is intimately tied to the rise of museum culture. Patricia Vigderman's, *The Real Life of the Parthenon*, will be referenced to explore some underlying questions: Should we be saving material culture of the past? And if so, who decides what is worth saving? Who pays for the preservation? Where does material culture belong – in its original site or as part of a museum, where it can be considered part of a global or cross-cultural conversation? And if it is not possible to preserve, will the current push for digitization be able to fill the gap left by the losses?

Case Study:

Current technological efforts to record endangered material culture will be discussed using the case of the 3-D printing of the destroyed Arch of Triumph from Palmyra, Syria.

Intended Conclusion:

As a practicing artist, whose work explores the long history of sacred places, I will conclude the presentation with how the ongoing debates about preservation and who owns the past have impacted my artistic process. The one to three years spent researching and drawing a site have involved me, in some small way, with a centuries long conversation with many of those who have engaged with the sites I have chosen to draw. I see my drawings as homage to the focused human attention centered on the buildings, places and objects that yet remain. I hope this presentation will act as invitation for a wider group discussion of how preservation and recording of remaining material culture can help us to participate in and maintain an on-going cultural narrative.

References:

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