



HISTORICAL PRESENCE IN VISUAL CULTURE

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On Disciplinary Disrepair Editor's Introduction

Shawn C. Simmons

About the Editor-in-Chief

Shawn C. Simmons is a Ph.D. student in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh. His research interests center on modern and contemporary art, with a focus on museological critique, queer and feminist art histories, archival studies, and visual cultures of science and technology. His research examines how artists engage institutional aesthetics to question how museums construct history and cultural memory. He holds a B.A. in Art History from New York University and an M.A. in Art History from the University of Colorado Boulder.

On Disciplinary Disrepair

Editor's Introduction

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This volume of *Contemporaneity* marks a return. After a four-year hiatus and a near-complete transition in editorial leadership, the relaunch of this journal has unfolded alongside seismic shifts in both the discipline and the world. The last volume of the journal was published in 2021, in a world already in crisis. Yet the years since have made clear that the intersecting struggles we face—against authoritarianism, structural inequity, and ecological devastation—are not temporary ruptures but enduring conditions. The shifting academic

landscape, too, has brought fresh challenges: shrinking job markets, intensified calls for disciplinary accountability, and the continued erosion of public trust in the humanities. In many ways, these conditions reaffirm the significance of graduate humanities research as a vehicle for urgent change.

In this context, we offer *Contemporaneity* as a platform not just for theorization, but for intervention. The theme of *Ruin and Reparation* provides the grounds to both address *Contemporaneity's* dedication to historical presence in visual culture and signal our collective conviction to act in response to our historically grounded present conditions. It is significant that this issue features contributors working across borders (both geographic and institutional) who use the tools of visual culture to address urgent, real-world concerns. To publish international scholarship in the United States in 2025 is to reckon with the privileges and responsibilities of our position; in this light, we see *Contemporaneity* as an evolving space for reparative dialogue across divides of language, method, and access. We also view it as a space for experimentation: one that is rooted in the historical present, yet open to new forms of thought.

This volume's theme emerged from graduate student thinking and from recent curricular reorientations within the Department of the History of Art and Architecture (HAA) at the University of Pittsburgh. In 2010, HAA launched its Constellations model, a framework for curriculum and programming that uses shared themes to connect otherwise disparate research interests. For the first time since their inception, the Constellations were revisited in 2023 through a departmental strategic plan. Coordinators Dr. Alison Langmead and graduate student Kale Serrato Doyen surveyed departmental faculty and graduate students, asked for the summative themes of their research, and proposed a new iteration of Constellations from this solicited input. Salient among survey responses were issues of *agency*, *cultural dispossession*, and *social justice*—leading Doyen to propose the addition of a new Reparation Constellation.


As we look ahead, this publication also signals a broader commitment to transformation. HAA recently received a major grant from the Mellon Foundation to center social justice analysis in the practice of art and architectural history. Over the next two years, this initiative will support a robust program of workshops, conversations, and curricular development designed to reimagine the discipline's critical methods and public responsibilities. *Contemporaneity* will play an active role in this process: the next issue of the journal will be dedicated to documenting, and reflecting on, the outcomes of this grant program.

The current volume unfolds in three parts. It opens with a short questionnaire that asks respondents to consider: *What does reparation mean for the history of art and architecture?* The centerpiece of the issue is an essay initially presented at our 2024 symposium by Amanda Guido Ochoa, who traces the adaptive reuse of Forte Prenestino, a nineteenth-century military fort on the outskirts of Rome, now repurposed by artists and activists as a space of autonomy and resistance. Ochoa's essay argues for an ethics of preservation that honors architectural decay as a site of emancipation and creative expression. The final section of the issue gathers

shorter reflections, reviews, and thought experiments that further expand the theme of (dis)repair across time, space, and disciplinary boundaries.

Finally, readers may notice that we have redesigned our website to reflect our expanded commitment to open-access, non-conventional scholarship. In addition to releasing our biennial peer-reviewed issues, the new site will host a rolling series of curated contributions designed to make work-in-progress and experimental forms of scholarship more accessible. This digital redesign is not simply cosmetic. It reflects our ongoing efforts to build a more flexible and inclusive platform for sharing ideas.

We are thrilled to welcome readers back to *Contemporaneity*. This volume reopens not only as a site of return, but also as a departure in sight—a threshold between what has been and what remains possible.

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