

The Topicality of Ruins in the Past, Present and Future

The interest in disused, decaying buildings appears to have a long history. This is demonstrated by numerous examples of archaeological tourism since antiquity. At certain times, the contemplation of ruins played a formative role in European culture, as evidenced by the pictorial worlds of Panini, Piranesi, C.D. Friedrich, Pompeian salons and artificial ruins in the gardens of European residences.

In late modernism, not least in the wake of the 'spatial turn', the ruin returns as a metaphor of contingency. This time it does not primarily stand for endurance and the timelessness of the imperial or the sublime. Rather, it functions – in line with the acceleration of world events – as a symbol of the changing times of modernity, of transformations, shrinking processes and the destructive violence of wars.

While monument conservation authorities in Western countries are concerned with the legal protection of railway stations, industrial complexes, military barracks, churches and, most recently, department stores that have lost their function, something else is going on under the radar of institutions. The processes of decay have long since become a source of fascination for the globally networked Urbex scene.

The morbid aura of modern ruins is perceived as an expression of the 'authentic' and as an antithesis to the all-encompassing economisation of cultural assets. Entering abandoned building complexes is a special kind of physical experience, an enjoyment of atmospheres. The immersive experience is processed photographically and disseminated to the appropriate communities via social media. But beyond our reality, the theme of ruin is also utilised by the virtual games and en-ertainment industry where AI-generated films and games deliver coveted, post-apocalyptic scenarios to order. The ruin is thus a metaphor for the state of the planet in the age of the Anthropocene.

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe were, and unfortunately still are, particularly confronted with the reality of war ruins. In this respect, the topic offers numerous perspectives as a leitmotif for this year's conference of the German-Polish Working Group for Art History and Monument Preservation.

The aim is to pursue a comparative objective in the context of time and space, to illuminate connecting lines and breaks in the reflection on ruins.

Conference languages will be German and English (without translation).

The conference is organised by the Chair of Cultural Heritage Studies of the European University Viadrina (Frankfurt/Oder) in cooperation with the Institute of Art History of the University of Warsaw.

Venue

Collegium Polonicum
ul. Kościuszki 1
PI 69-100 Słubice

Scientific Committee

Beate Störtkuhl (Federal Institute for Culture and History of Eastern Europe, Oldenburg)
Hanna Grzeszczuk-Brendel (Technical University Poznan)
Katja Bernhardt (Berlin)
Mariusz Smoliński (University of Warsaw)
Paul Zalewski (European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder)

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To support the organization, please
register your participation before 30.11.2025
by e-mail at: ruins@europa-uni.de

Please let us know if you would like to take part
in the evening tour of the city museum in Frankfurt
(in German) on 4 December and the two dinners
(at your own expense) on 4 and 5 December.

No conference fee will be charged.



32th Conference of the German-Polish Working Group for Art History and Monument Preservation.

The Topicality of Ruins in the Past, Present and Future

Zur Aktualität von Ruinen
in der Vergangenheit, Gegenwart
und Zukunft

04.-06. December 2025

Europa-Universität
Viadrina (Frankfurt/Oder) -
Collegium Polonicum, Słubice

Thursday, 4 December

- 09.00 Registration
09.30 Paul Zalewski • Introduction

Past interpretations

- 10.00 Magdalena Garnczarska, Kraków
• The Perception of Ruins in Byzantium
10.30 Filip Binder, Praha
• Artificial Ruins in the Bohemian Lands

Coffee break 11.00-11.30

- 11.30 Rafał Makafa, Gdańsk
• Neugebaute Ruine als „lieux de memoire“ in Mitteleuropa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert
12.00 Dominik Ziarkowski, Kraków
• Romantic vs. Contemporary Perceptions of Ruins: A Case Study of Castles in the Kraków-Częstochowa Upland
12.30 Uta Coburger, Bruchsal
• Schloss Heidelberg. Von der Ruine zum Museum vs. die Ruine als Museum?

Lunch break 13.00-14.00

Between Rejection and Appropriation

- 14.00 Konstantin Hermann, Dresden
• Ruinenschönheit – von der alltäglichen Dystopie zur lost places – Begeisterung. Eine denkmalpflegerische Reflexion
14.30 Jonathan Zisook, Pittsburgh
• German Jewish Ruins and Polish Identity: The Case of Synagogues and Cemeteries in Western Poland
15.00 Małgorzata Omilanowska, Warszawa
• Die wichtigste Ruine. Das Grab des unbekanntenen Soldaten in Warschau

Coffee break 15.30-16.00

- 16.00-17.30 **Panel discussion** „Liegt unsere Zukunft in Ruinen? Die Herausforderungen für Architektur, Denkmalpflege, Stadtplanung“: Moderation Paul Zalewski, Elke Bergt, Evangelische Kirche Mitteldeutschland, Thomas Drachenberg, Brandenburgisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologisches Landesmuseum, Antje Bruno, Architects for Future, Berlin
18.30 Guided tour of the Viadrina City Museum in Frankfurt (Oder) in German, Halina Muchow
20.30 Tables reserved at the "Taverna Athos" restaurant in the old storehouse building on Frankfurt's Oder promenade (pay your own way)

Friday, 5 December

Lost places?

- 09.00 Aude Le Gallou, Genève
• Urbex erforschen – mit Urbex forschen : Für eine sinnliche und affektive Geographie verlassener Orte
09.30 Ewa Róża Janion, Warszawa
• Ghost Town, Wastecape. Rethinking Modern Ruins of an Abandoned Town. The Case of Roghudi in Southern Calabria
10.00 Aleksander Bielecki
• The Ruins of the Quistorp Tower and the Making of Szczecin's Postwar Identity

Coffee break 10.30-11.00

In the Eyes of the Artists

- 11.00 Luca Renzi, Urbino
• Die Antike-Erfahrung in Italien und die Ruinen bei Goethe und anderen Autoren, zwischen Klassik und Romantik
11.30 Pierre Wat, Paris
• The Mineral and Abstract Future of Ruins
12.00 Varvara Keidan Shavrova, London • Untouched

Lunch break 12.30-13.30

Ruins and Rubble in Popular Media

- 13.30 Peter Sproule, Kingston-Berlin
• The Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche as a Fashion Landmark: Re-dressing War Ruins in West Berlin
14.00 Frank Rochow, Cottbus
• Was Ruinen meinen. Zur Bedeutung von Ruinenbildern in der aktuellen Kriegsberichterstattung
14.30 Pia Schlechter, Oldenburg
• Selfies in der Wolfsschanze mit Bunkerruinen. Zwischen „romantic gaze“, affektiv-körperlichem, „Wander-Natur-Erlebnis“ und authentifizierender historischer Bedeutungsproduktion

Coffee break 15.00-15.30

Ruins of State Socialism

- 15.30-15.50 Sopiko Makharadze, Berlin- Kurzvortrag
• Von Kulturpalästen zu Ruinen: Kulturerbe und Erinnerung im postsowjetischen Kontext
15.50-16.10 Anton Polskiy, Berlin - Kurzvortrag
• The "Shithole Aesthetics" of Post-Socialist Ruins: Street Art, Memory, and Contestation in East Berlin

Break 16.10-16.25

- 16.25-18.00 Final Discussion
• Katja Bernhardt, Beate Störtkuhl, Mariusz Smoliński, Hanna Grzeszczuk-Brendel. Moderation Paul Zalewski
19.00 Tables reserved at the restaurant "Villa Casino" in Słubice, ul. Mickiewicza 11 (pay your own way)

Saturday, 6 December (information exchange)

- 09.00 Robert Schümann, Halle
• Ist das Geschichte oder kann das weg? Erste Befunde zum Projekt „Verloren, verwandelt, wiederentdeckt – Lost Places in Sachsen-Anhalt gemeinsam sichtbar machen“
09.15 Frank Rochow, Cottbus
• Abriss, Verfall, Zerstörung. Vergänglichkeitserfahrungen in der Architektur
09.30 Felix Schmieder, Ellingen
• Ausstellung „Ein Akt der Unterwerfung? 500 Jahre Herzogtum Preußen“. Kulturzentrum Ostpreussen, Ellingen
09.45 Anna Michalska, Magdeburg
• Ausstellung „Erbauung (an) der Vergangenheit – Der Magdeburger Dom und die Wiederentdeckung des Mittelalters in Preußen“. Kulturhistorisches Museum Magdeburg (bis 05.2026)

Break 10.00-10.15

- 10.15 Agnieszka Lindenhayn-Fiedorowicz, Tim S. Müller, Frankfurt (Oder)
• Kunst und Architektur des Bistums Lebus (1124-1598). Ein deutsch-polnisches Forschungs- und Ausstellungsprojekt.
10.30 Agnieszka Gašior, Görlitz
• Buchvorstellung "Von der Renaissance zum Barock (1570-1670). Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kunst in Ostmitteleuropa", Band 5
10.45 Agnese Bergholde-Wolf, Marburg
• Interaktionsraum Diaspora. Theorie und Praxis des Sammelns am Beispiel baltischer Diaspora-Communities
11.00 Acknowledgements and closing remarks