

Crash and Burn: Destruction in American Art

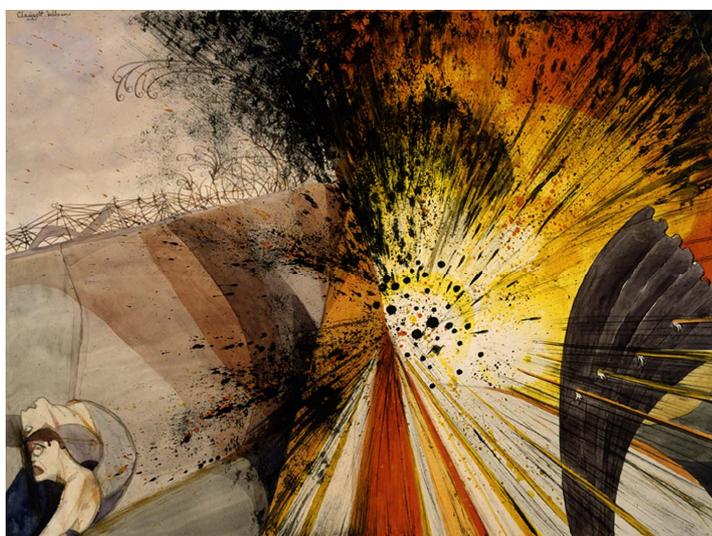
CONFERENCE

Friday 5 June 2015, 13.30 - 19.00 (with registration from 13.00)

Saturday 6 June 2015, 10.30 - 17.30 (with registration from 10.00)

Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre

The Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN



Claggett Wilson, *Flower of Death--The Bursting of a Heavy Shell--Not as It Looks, but as It Feels and Sounds and Smells*, ca. 1919, watercolour and pencil on paperboard. Smithsonian American Art Museum. Gift of Alice H. Rossin.

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-imagining. 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.

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 will consider works of art of all mediums and periods, as well as a wider range of visual and material culture.

Ticket/entry details: Open to all, free admission, but booking is required in advance. **Details to follow.**

Organised by H el ene 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

PROGRAMME

Friday, 5 June

- 13.00 - 13.30 Registration
- 13.30 - 14.00 **Introductory remarks**
- 14.00 - 15.30 **Session 1: Materialising Destruction**
- 'Photography and the Ash-Heap': Bruce Nauman's Burning Small Fires*
Taylor Walsh (Harvard University)
- Martin Johnson Heade's Anti-landscapes*
Maggie Cao (Columbia University)
- Horace Pippin: Burnt Wood*
Lauren Kroiz (University of California, Berkeley)
- 15.30 - 16.00 COFFEE/TEA BREAK (tea /coffee provided) Seminar Room 1
- 16.00 - 17.30 **Session 2: Modernism's Corpses**
- Queer (Dis)figuration: Paul Thek and the Corpus of American Art, c. 1967*
Oliver Shultz (Stanford University)
- Re-Politicizing the Happening, or Re-animating its Corpse?*
Catherine Spencer (University of St Andrews)
- Valences of Destruction: Allan Sekula and the Comic*
Andrew Witt (University College London)
- 17.30 - 18.00 Closing remarks and COMFORT BREAK
- 18.00 - 19.00 **Keynote Lecture**
- Performing Iconoclasm*
Wendy Bellion (University of Delaware)
- 19.00 RECEPTION

Saturday, 6 June

10.00 - 10.30 Registration

10.30 - 12.30 **Session 3: Excavating the Urban**

'A Sort of Death': George Bellows and Edward Hopper in the Dead City
David Peters Corbett (University of East Anglia)

Bulldozer Aesthetics: Alexander Calder and Robert Morris in Grand Rapids, Michigan
Amanda Douberley (School of the Art Institute of Chicago)

Noise Abatement Zone: John Divola's Photographic Fulcrum
Jason E. Hill (New-York Historical Society)

All This Stuff: Jack Smith's Queer Materialism
Joshua Lubin-Levy (NYU)

12.30 - 14.00 LUNCH BREAK (sandwich lunch provided)

14.00 - 16.00 **Session 4: Atomic Age Landscapes**

'Operation Crossroads': American Abstraction in the Atomic Age
Jody Patterson (Plymouth University)

Fragmented Visions: American Art and Popular Geography During World War II
Tatsiana Zhurauliova (University of Chicago)

Potential and Devastation in Norman Lewis' Abstract Expressionism
Andrianna Campbell (CUNY)

Under the Nuclear Threat (Again): Reagan's 'Star Wars' and Video Art of the Early 1980s
Liz Kim (The Courtauld Institute of Art)

16.00 - 16.30 COFFEE/TEA BREAK (tea /coffee provided)

16.30 - 17.30 **Plenary Session**

17.30 END