

[\(online\) Toppling Things. The Visuality, Space and Affect of Monument Removal](#)

Discussion published by Nausikaä El-Mecky on Thursday, January 14, 2021

Type:

Conference

Date:

January 21, 2021 to January 22, 2021

Location:

Spain

Subject Fields:

Art, Art History & Visual Studies, Cultural History / Studies, French History / Studies, Humanities, Political History / Studies

Toppling Things. The Visuality, Space and Affect of Monument Removal

Date: 21-22 January 2021

Organizers: Nausikaä El-Mecky, Tomas Macsotay

It is possibly too soon to know whether the events of 2020, after the shocking murder of George Floyd, will represent a point of no return for the ways in which we engage monuments and memorials. What is true is that Black Lives Matter (BLM) has made it possible to open new territory in thinking though monuments, going far beyond a political debate on (partial) obfuscations and removals of statues. Instead, the movement has shifted attention towards painful remembrance and protest action, whether they pivot around a statue or not.

As part of the research project Prehistories of the Installation, the two-day colloquium Toppling Things examines the longer tradition of art environments marked by performative complements, where ceremonies, iterations, games or the applying of parerga allow for a scenography or immersive space to come alive. This event, where scholars of historical and contemporary art destruction join the company of activists and artists involved in or inspired by BLM, examines the tensions and (seeming) contradictions that come into play when monuments are attacked. Important questions broached here connect up with monument removals over the past few years, but emerge equally strongly from scholarship on historical iconoclasm. For instance, how protest and punctual attacks on monuments upset notions of the permanent and the ephemeral, how they dissolve the contradiction between the spontaneous and the staged, inscribe the emotional into the pragmatic, or collapse the authentic into the performative.

The unusual point of entry for this conference is its determination to combine the perspective of a historical understanding of iconoclasm with the situatedness of participants in the new wave of monument removal actions, where special attention is paid to dynamics of visibility, presence-absence, reciprocity and emotionality within the economies of the actions undertaken by protesters on the streets, and on to the mediatized gestures and sited artworks that follow on from them or that share in their goals. The conference proposes that we can no longer rely for this work of interpretation on models of aesthetic viewing developed for modernist and contemporary art, but must look instead to give the agendas, ethics and motivations of activists and artistic interventionists

their due. These drives and modes of resistance represent far more than a mere “context” for the protests – indeed, they should be treated as pertinent accounts for how, why and in what way we memorialize in public space.

The event will be held on 21 and 22 January 2021 via Zoom.

If you wish to attend, please register, free of cost, via this link: <https://forms.gle/5pHftYvEnjuDxshX9>

Toppling Things.

The Visuality, Space and Affect of Monument Removal
Programme

DEPARTAMENT D'HUMANITATS, UNIVERSITAT POMPEU FABRA,
Ramon Trias Fargas, 25-27, 08005 Barcelona, Spain

THURSDAY - 21 JANUARY 2021

10:30 Welcome and introduction to the conference theme by
Tomas MACSOTAY and Nausikaä El-MECKY (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona)

10:45 Session 1: The Charge of History

Karo MORET MIRANDA (Australian National University) – Is a reckoning with History possible?

Isabel VALVERDE (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona) – tbc

12:15-13:30 Lunch break

13:30 Session 2 : Repetitions, Substitutions

Ursula STRÖBELE (ZIK, München) – Toppling monuments – media strategies of artistic interventions

Tomas MACSOTAY (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona) – Taking a Knee: Permanence, Ritual and the Respect Insurrection

15:45 Short Break

16:00 Session 3 : Working the Monument in Art and Activism

Romy RONDELTAPE (The Baileo Foundation, Netherlands) – Down with JP Coen

Adam BROOMBERG (HFBK Hamburg) & Rafaël LEMMENS-CHAPDELAINÉ & Guy DELANCEY (tbc)
– Hacking Monuments: Digital Monument Modification and the Pitfalls of Augmented Reality

Ada PINKSTON (Monument Lab, Townson University) – Empty Pedestals or The Aesthetics of Truth

18:30 Short Break

18:45 Krzysztof WODICZKO – Artist’s presentation, departing from events of 2020

19:30 ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION - Relaying the Monument

FRIDAY - 22 JANUARY 2021

13 :30 Session 3 : Erasures, Absences

Erin THOMPSON (CUNY) - Reading the Writing on the Statue: Why Signage Doesn't Neutralize Controversial Monuments

Nausikaä El-MECKY (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona) - The agency of the void: when a monument falls, absence alchemises into powerful presence

15:00 Short Break

15:15 Session 4

Ernst van ALPHEN (LEIDEN University) - TBC

Ann CVETKOVICH (Carleton University in Ottawa) - Kent Monkman's Shame and Resilience and Queer and Indigenous Museum Exhibition

16:45 Short break

17:00 Conversation on Black Lives Matter 1, followed by Q&A
Stacy BOLDRICK (University of Leicester, UK) interviews Tami SAWYER

17:55 Conversation on Black Lives Matter 2, followed by Q&A
Richard CLAY (Newcastle University, UK) interviews Rev. Dr. Keith MAGEE (UCL, London, Newcastle University, UK)

19:00 Concluding Remarks : Shape of the Publication

Contact Info:

Convenors:

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