

Bodies Under Duress: Violence, Pressure, and the Visual



Building on last year's theme of Revolution, the UCLA Art History Graduate Student Symposium turns toward the bodies through which political, social, and historical transformations are imagined, enacted, and contested. This symposium understands the body not merely as flesh and bone, but also as individual, collective, political, and institutional bodies through which power is constituted, exercised, and negotiated. Violence does not operate only through moments of spectacular rupture. It may also take the form of sustained pressure, discipline, confinement, displacement, extraction, exposure, or erasure.

Across art and visual culture, bodies have served as both the objects upon which power is exercised and the means through which its effects become visible, imaginable, and contested. Bodies Under Duress invites scholars to consider how visual and material practices register the forces exerted upon bodies, while also asking not only what happens to bodies under violence, but how violence is made possible, legitimized, enacted, and remembered or forgotten.

Theme

This symposium approaches the body as a site at which violence and power are represented, materialized, negotiated, and contested. We invite papers that examine bodily duress across historical periods, geographic regions, media, and methodological traditions. Violence may be understood in its overt forms, including warfare, punishment, incarceration, torture, enslavement, and forced displacement, but also through less visible or spectacular conditions such as surveillance, labor, illness, environmental degradation, colonial administration, social discipline, and institutional control.

How have artists and image-makers represented bodies subjected to violence, pressure, or constraint? How might visual culture normalize, aestheticize, conceal, or expose the operations of power? In what ways do images participate in the production of bodily difference, vulnerability, disposability, or criminality? How are violence and duress embedded not only in representations of the body but also in artistic materials, modes of production, architectures, institutions, archives, and systems of display?

We also encourage approaches that move beyond the representational. How might violence alter the body's ontological status, its relation to personhood, subjectivity, sovereignty, or the more-than-human world? What forms of knowledge emerge through bodily endurance, fragmentation, opacity, refusal, care, or repair? How do injured, disciplined, absent, transformed, or resistant bodies challenge established distinctions between subject and object, presence and disappearance, agency and subjection?

By attending to both spectacular violence and the prolonged pressures that shape embodied life, *Bodies Under Duress* seeks to examine how art and visual culture make structures of power visible while also opening spaces for resistance, survival, remembrance, and transformation.

Possible Topics

Submissions may address, but are not limited to:

- Representations and visualizations of violence
- Punishment, execution, incarceration, and carceral space
- War, militarization, occupation, and displacement
- Colonialism, racialization, enslavement, and bodily discipline
- Gendered and sexual violence
- Labor, extraction, exhaustion, and the disciplined body
- Disability, illness, injury, pain, and medicalized bodies
- Surveillance, censorship, visibility, and enforced opacity
- Ecological violence and human or more-than-human embodiment
- Monuments, memorials, archives, and the afterlives of violence
- Materiality, fragmentation, embodiment, and ontological transformation
- Resistance, refusal, care, repair, and bodily survival

Submission Information

Please submit the following:

- A paper abstract of no more than 250 words
- A short curriculum vitae
- Submission deadline: September 30, 2026
- Notification of acceptance: October 13, 2026
- Symposium date: November 13, 2026
- Submission and inquiries: oguzcanunal@ucla.edu

The UCLA Art History Graduate Student Symposium welcomes submissions from graduate students working across art history, visual studies, architecture, archaeology, museum studies, performance studies, and related fields. We encourage interdisciplinary, transhistorical, and global approaches.