

Department of the History of Art
The University of California, Riverside

Decay into Chaos

12th Annual Art History Graduate Student Association Conference
University of California, Riverside
UCR Arts, May 20th, 2023

Call for Proposals:

The University of California, Riverside's Art History Graduate Student Association is pleased to announce its 12th Annual Conference, *Decay into Chaos*.

El Anatsui's 1992 sculpture *Erosion* forms an intricately decaying tree; the winding structure terminates in a wreckage of fragments at the base. The recognizable form of the living tree becomes something else entirely. In a 1994 interview with art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu, Anatsui elucidates his intention in creating the sculpture: "I was not thinking of soil erosion . . . but something more basic than that, something which is at the root of it, but which is more monumental, more epochal--the erosion of cultures." The sculpture comes to embody the concept of decay, questioning the permanence of culture. In this material manifestation of erosion, the artist understands culture as chaotic and dynamic.

The concept of decay is often linked to chaos, envisaged as an entropic disintegration. Chaos erodes the stability of orders that attempt to define people, landscapes, and materials within singular understandings of time, place, and worldview. Materials corrode, bodies degrade, traditions change, and memories fade, revealing the fallacy of a singular and constant truth. Artists and thinkers within various cultural contexts have returned to a fascination with decay as a vehicle to explore the chaos of life. Within this awareness, scholars have analyzed decay and disorder as epistemologies, addressing change and the individual's response to it.

How have artists, scholars, and archivists defined chaos and decay? How do concepts of decay and disorder betray anxieties about the instabilities and uncertainties of change? How does their work embody and respond to the fragility of systems? How do they reconstruct memory in the face of loss? Does decay always lead to chaos? How do these conditions enable new potentialities to emerge? We strive to ask how the arts and humanities engage with frameworks of chaos and decay: what can a decay into chaos create?

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- Migration and movement
- Loss and memory
- Social activism and protest art
- Architectural ruins and the cult of ruins
- Iconoclasm
- Decadence
- Bodily illness, aging, and horror
- Preservation and conservation
- The process of historicization

We invite abstracts of no more than 300 words for 20-minute paper presentations. Proposals from graduate students in any discipline will be considered, especially including Art, Art History, Anthropology, Literature, Dance Studies, Ethnic Studies, Global Studies, History, Media and Cultural Studies, Music, Religious Studies, Philosophy, and others. Selected speakers will be invited to share information related to their presentation on the conference website: <http://ahgsaconference.ucr.edu/>.

Apply:

Please email your abstract and CV to ahgsa.ucr@gmail.com by **March 22, 2023**, at **11:59 pm** PT. The conference co-organizers will be in touch with the selected speakers in **early April**.

The conference will be held in person and will be free and open to the public. If you have any questions, please contact conference co-organizers Becky Luo and Elizabeth Carleton at ahgsa.ucr@gmail.com.