

Damage Control

The A-Z of Destruction

14.11.2014-15.02.2015

This text is published on the occasion
of the exhibitions

Damage Control

Art and Destruction Since 1950

Curators

Kerry Brougher, Russell Ferguson

Kunsthhaus Graz

Universalmuseum Joanneum

Lendkai 1, 8020 Graz

November 14, 2014 until

February 15, 2015

Damage Control

Body Art and Destruction 1968–1972

Curator

Roman Grabner

BRUSEUM/Neue Galerie Graz

Universalmuseum Joanneum

Joanneumsviertel, 8010 Graz

November 14, 2014 until

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This booklet on *The A to Z of Destruction* is published on the occasion of the exhibition *Damage Control. Art and Destruction Since 1950* at the Kunsthhaus Graz, first shown in Washington. It is complemented by the position of *Body Art* at the BRUSEUM. The terms chosen revolve around this major topic, seeking to draw lines between the two exhibitions, but also by means of the works shown to reflect on the meaning of destruction and damage control.

Architecture

The reasons for destruction in architecture are wars, revolutions, environmental influences, reconstruction and also simply disuse. When buildings are no longer usable, they are demolished or blown up to make space for new ones. Some are powerful symbols of a cultural community and as such become projection surfaces of aggression against the community when conflicts arise. When anonymous architecture is attacked, the target is the building's residents, their protection and shelter. When it is also destroyed on a large scale the aim is to demolish the foundations of civilised life. It is often images of destroyed buildings that stand for triumph and defeat. As a war correspondent, Luc Delahaye has seen a lot and in his work he questions—as too does Thomas Ruff—the meaning of such media images.

→ Photography
(*Space01*)

Body

The depiction of one's own body in attacked, destroyed and abused states has, at the latest since Body Art, been a key theme in visual art. Günter Brus was one of the most radical representatives with his *Body Analyses*. From 1967 to 1970 he drove to extremes a radical reduction in existential and elementary experiences particularly.

With *Zerreiβprobe* (endurance test), the drawer's line becomes an actual cut in the body; the painter has left behind the canvas and himself becomes the central object and means of the action, which at this time goes right to the limit of what is bearable. Günter Brus (→ *Insanity*) first attracted international attention with the other Austrian Actionists in 1966 in London (→ *Symposium*). (*BRUSEUM*)

Chaos

After a successful bout of destruction, often at first there remains nothing other than chaos and wasteland. But this is not the case in Michael Landy's work: he

had all of his possessions inventoried and then publicly destroyed. Apart from everyday objects and furniture, this included all his documents. What remains of a person when they no longer own anything?

Dara Friedman's film, on the other hand, shows the chaos of a smashed-up room being brought back into → *Order*. (*Space01*)

Decline

The American Dream has come to an end. The belief that anyone can make it right to the top if only he works hard enough is dwindling. The beautiful white houses that Sam Durant shows are dilapidated, destroyed and uninhabitable. (→ *Architecture*) Once they were case studies in modern building. The *Case Study Houses* programme, which involved exiled Austrian Richard Neutra, and also Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, had the objective after the Second World War of designing simple affordable model houses that corresponded to a modern architectural concept.

Apart from human failure, natural disasters can also be responsible for the destruction of buildings. On her huge sheets of paper, Monica Bonvicini shows the damage that a hurricane can do. (*Space01*)

Explosion

During peacetime, explosions usually serve to tear down large bulky masses such as rock and also buildings. During wartime, detonations are used to destroy enemy territory that another party is seeking to occupy, conquer and capture. The aim is to do damage, sometimes driven by scientific curiosity, but almost always as a political demonstration of power. When the Americans detonated the atom bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki they wanted to end the war, to try out the military exploitation of nuclear fission and so also to establish their global political might. Richard Edgerton's films made the atomic explosions visible, so that Yves Klein suggests in a letter to the president that he set off these formidable mushroom clouds in his famous

International Klein Blue. It is a strange experience for us when a still life such as we know from 17th-century Dutch art suddenly comes to life in that it explodes and scatters in slow motion in thousands of tiny pieces, as in Ori Gersht's work.
(*Space02*)

Fight

Hand grenades are thrown by people so that they explode, shatter and destroy. In direct fighting they often injure people, soldiers as well as civilians. By arranging these missiles in fragile Murano glass in a variety of colours Mona Hatoum references the fragility of life, placing them on a gurney as a further allusion to a painful death. The bodies are absent; we do not have to regard the 'pain of others' (Susan Sontag), yet we are nonetheless aware of the political message of the artist, who is originally from Lebanon.
(*Space01*)

Gap

Nearly two centuries lie between the creation of *Desastres de la Guerra* and the reworking of Francisco de Goya's 82 etchings by the brothers Dinos und Jake Chapman. The Spanish painter's famous series of prints from 1810 to 1814 shows the *Disasters of War* fought by the Spanish against the French occupation in a particularly unsparing and haunting way, without making any judgements based on state politics. His only topic is its barbarity and irrationality. During his lifetime, Goya kept this cycle under lock and key because of the threat it posed to his own safety. The first series was not published until 1863, after his death. The Chapman brothers purchased one of the many cycles and altered it very subtly. It is only at a second glance that one detects the colourful but delicate interventions, which raise the absurd elements in the fighting into the realm of the grotesque.
(*Space01*)

Heritage

An important feature of our western culture is keeping and preserving old things. One of the tasks of a museum is to conserve respectfully the heritage handed down to us by previous generations. What happens, then, when the museum piece falls on the floor, as in Thomas Demand's case? The vase is irreversibly destroyed, like the old Ming vase in Ai Weiwei's work. Political regimes use the deliberate break with the past of a strong culture, such as the Chinese culture for instance, in order to change the identity of a population, to set it new objectives, to keep it under control. Ai Weiwei, who values his own history, tradition and art, uses his work to put his finger on the sore point of an entire people. For him the destruction of cultural assets is associated with the dismantling of his country, even if the concept of history and the past is different in China than in Europe.
(*Space01*)

Insanity

Der helle Wahnsinn, 'pure madness', is the name of one of the last actions by Günter Brus, in which he went so close to the limits that the next logical step would have been suicide. Stephan Laub uses weights to stretch his face into a smile. Dennis Oppenheim slowly pushes a skewer under his skin, while VALIE EXPORT rolls over pieces of broken glass. Body Art goes to the boundaries of what the artist can endure, makes the body into material and unsettles the public's thinking habits, its madness getting under their skin too.
(*BRUSEUM*)

Joke

At first glance, humour would appear to contradict the theme of destruction. All the same, humour can also be a means of coping with horror. Jean Tinguely offers a striking demonstration of this with his actions from the 1960s, when in the face of the threatening situation of the Cold War he made sculptures and installations that destroy themselves, such as

the *Homage to New York* machine, which self-destructed in the courtyard of MOMA in New York in 1960. The sculpture *Sorceress* also shakes until all its parts have fallen off. *Study of the End of the World* is a work that ultimately ironises in a very effective way the atomic tests that were still being carried out in Sierra Nevada in the USA up until the 1990s. Tinguely stages machines, devices, cameras, journalists, himself and his wife Niki de Saint Phalle. The test begins, the countdown is progressing, everything appears highly professional. An explosion follows. Fortunately the world is still turning, but all the machines have been destroyed, clouds of smoke hide the → Chaos. Tinguely demonstrates the (→ Insanity) implied by such tests, initiated by power and a stronger party's will to dominate.

(Space02)

Knocked Out

Urs Odermatt was a policeman. Whenever he attended and surveyed an accident he would also photograph the processed events with his private camera. In this

way works emerged that embedded the accident in a landscape, gave it a composition and in which it lost its drastic horror through the developing aesthetic. One does not see victims, only the wrecks.

Juan Munoz's train has been derailed. The wagons are stacked, as if they were stacked up on top of one another after a crash. The heavy steel model of a modern high-speed train is cool and smooth on the outside, on the inside extends an urban landscape that seems empty and deserted. What caused the crash? Where are the inhabitants?
(Space02)

Liberation

Destruction can also be experienced as a liberation. Often looking at art also has something liberating about it, particularly if we are drawn beyond time and space by unexpected moments. The aspect of corrosion in art seems at first glance to contradict this. Destruction relates to an opponent, and it charges: oneself, someone or something else. John Baldessari was dissatisfied

with his painting and in the concept of its (→ Zero) destruction found a new beginning that brought him international recognition as an artist. Likewise Günter Brus was seeking a way to leave painting behind. He first liberated himself from the brush, then the canvas, making his own body the focus of the confrontation in the actions. He is one of the founders of Body Art. (→ Body, Viennese Actionism)
(Space02, BRUSEUM)

Media

The media plays a key role in the topic of destruction. Bruce Conner's *A Movie* is cut rapidly, combining distinctive sections of found image material from various unwanted film rolls. Themes of American popular culture, the life of superstars such as Marilyn Monroe, fast cars or heroes in aeroplanes at the beginning of the Cold War at the end of the 1950s show not only the American Dream, but also the power of destruction. An apocalyptic mood spreads, as in Luc Delahaye's large photos. By the 1960s Andy Warhol was already addressing

the theme of the power of the media and the commercialisation of news more than almost any other contemporary artist. His multiple images of the newspaper photograph of an electric chair referred to a wider discussion that was going on around the death penalty in the USA at the time. In 1972 the death penalty was abolished by the Supreme Court for a short while to put a stop to the arbitrary application.
(Space02)

Noise

Raphael Ortiz took part in the *Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS, → Symposium) organised by Gustav Metzger in 1966 in London with John Sharkey in order to discuss the repercussions for art of the growing potential for global destruction since 1945. At his *Piano Destruction Concert* Ortiz smashed up a piano with an axe. He repeated this action in 2014 for the *Damage Control* exhibitions in Washington and Luxembourg. The ruining of the instrument becomes a concert itself, a destructive ritual that gives birth to new life.
(Space01)

Order

Order creates structures, order means the opposite of chaos, and it holds together a whole in its system. Order creates both freedom and constriction. If it is not ideal, it offers space for conflicts, is destroyed and re-established. It can be a challenge for every flat-share, and also for political orders in much the same way. Here imbalances lead likewise to destruction, revolts and breaks with existing systems. In art, orders play just as much a role as in the scheme of its history. Art encounters friction with both on a regular basis, to great effect.

Photography

Ever since it first existed, it has often been assumed that photography is somehow authentic: we are quick to believe that what the photo shows is actually a representative segment of reality. Potential manipulations are uncritically ignored, although one knows that even early war photography was extremely staged and still today photos are changed for the purposes of propaganda or

advertising. Thomas Ruff addresses the theme of distribution of media images and their digital archives, as does Luc Delahaye, who is an experienced press photographer and so knows exactly to what extent the 'right' detail can shape the perception of entire countries. (→ Architecture) Ed Ruscha's picture of the burning museum shows that painting is also in a position to ask questions about our relationship with reality. The LA County Museum never actually caught fire: the image is an effective fiction to challenge the authority of the institution. (*Space01*)

Quiet

Reports state that after great disasters an unbelievable, often ghostly silence reigns. On the other hand, across the world allegedly over 90 per cent are 'silent disasters', meaning that they happen without great media attention but with severe damage to those affected. *Larry, we are going down...*, records the black box of an aeroplane that crashed in America in 1982. The power lies in the quietness of these last

words of a pilot who can no longer be rescued. Quiet destruction is also a theme in Steve McQueen's work. The house wall repeatedly falls down over the black man, yet he puts up with it and keeps a straight face. (*Space01*)

Riot

Often during unrest cars are smashed up and windows broken. In his photos, Gordon Matta-Clark shows the buildings with shattered windowpanes that were often to be seen in the Bronx in New York, partly also because they were rarely repaired. As part of one of his exhibitions in New York, Matta-Clark deliberately broke the windows of the exhibition venue and so vividly highlighted the power of the institution and above all the power of money. Unlike the windows of the tenements, the gallery windows were mended immediately. Matta-Clark's *Splitting* is a drastic work in which he cuts an abandoned American house in two. (→ Architecture) Pipilotti Rist takes a different approach: as the girl in the red

shoes, she floats through the streets in her powder-blue dress and quite unexpectedly smashes in one car window after another with her red stem plant. It seems that the destruction is tolerated since neither passersby nor the policewoman have a problem with it. Rist plays with male and female symbols, while her musical composition also emphasizes the fairytale innocence of her narrative, and in doing so further increases the vehemence of its destructive force. (*Space02*, *Space01*)

Symposium

In 1966 Gustav Metzger set up the legendary *Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS) in London, which made clear how many artists of his generation were already occupying themselves with the issue of destruction in art. At this symposium the Viennese Actionists—Günter Brus, Kurt Kren, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch and Peter Weibel—appeared in front of an international audience for the first time. Nitsch recited his writing while Brus and Muehl, contrary to an

agreement, carried out an action. Their performance was a huge success. (Space01, BRUSEUM)

Tradition

Tradition describes the handing down of certain behaviours, beliefs or values to following generations. Traditions strengthen both families and of course wider cultural communities. They provide stability. Yet they can also be shackles, because there is no room for innovative thoughts or material. The artists of Modernism at the beginning of the 20th century saw themselves as innovators, breaking with traditions and writing euphoric manifestos. After 1945 Europe was traumatised after two world wars, while the USA (→ Explosion) acquired its global political importance. In art too, the search was on for new fitting opportunities. Destruction became a major theme in this. (Space02)

Uneasy

At the *Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS) it was destruction in art, not the destruction of art, that was called for. Nonetheless every creative process also implies annihilation and requires the negation (→ Zero) of the old in order that the new can be created. (→ Liberation)

Jeff Wall's early work *Destroyed Room* shows a strictly staged space in which every detail has been arranged for the shot. Like a backdrop, the setting refers to a storyline that might have happened and became the cause of this → Chaos. Jeff Wall refers to Eugène Delacroix's large-scale work *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827), which shows the self-arranged death scene of the Assyrian king, in which he not only has himself and his followers destroyed, but also his belongings. (Space01)

Violence

Violence always has a damaging effect on a person, animal or object. Violence implies that the

other party is not necessarily participating of their own free will. Violence is always connected to hierarchy; the saying 'only the strongest will survive' persists until today. What constitutes strength, and at what point is it negatively perceived as violence? The hooligans shown by Roy Arden strikingly demonstrate how aggression finds a channel into violence and brutality and equally the attempt to keep aggression in check with police actions. The guitar dragged along the street by Christian Marclay leaves a trace of violence also on us. Steve McQueen's work is oppressive in its silence. Violence can be quiet, yet extremely brutal too. (Space01)

Wiener Aktionismus

Viennese Actionism was a very specific manifestation of Action Art that emerged in Austria parallel to the international Happening or Fluxus movement. In 1964 Günter Brus, Hermann Nitsch, Rudolf Schwarzkogler and Otto Muehl founded the movement, and a couple of years later Peter Weibel coined the term *Wiener*

Aktionismus. The actionists broke taboos, attacked the bourgeois concept of art and during the international period of upheaval of the '68 generation made very vehement demands for the destruction of all predetermined ideologies and values. The aim was a better, personally uninhibited society freed from psychological and physical constraints. The actual 'sein' or 'being' of real life superseded the experienced deceptive 'Schein' or 'appearance' of an illusionistic reality—the action, the image, the body became material. (BRUSEUM)

X

X stands for negation, denotes deletions and so also prohibitions. Crossed swords also make an X and like positioned antitank obstacles they symbolise violence, war or rage. Wherever they crop up, destruction is on the cards. Weapons have changed over the course of history, as has the vehemence of their power of impact. Art, however, has always addressed the theme of fighting and its consequences.

Yoko

With her *Cut Piece*, Yoko Ono was an important participant at the *Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS). She called on the audience to cut the clothes from her motionless body until she sat completely naked on the stage. In 1966 after DIAS she also had an exhibition in London and there she met John Lennon. At the BRUSEUM, *Eros/ion* by VALIE EXPORT can be seen, a work which demonstrates the vehemence of Austrian Body Art. She rolls naked over pieces of broken glass and then leaves her traces on a canvas.
(Space01, BRUSEUM)

Zero

The Show is over ..., the public may go home, writes Christopher Wool in large letters on the poster at the end of the exhibition. Here he is quoting the French Situationist Guy Debord, who in 1967 in *The Society of the Spectacle* radically challenges capitalism referring to the writings of *The Apocalypse of Our Time* (1918) by Russian Nihilist Vasily Vasilievich

Rozanov. The negation of the canvas as an image conveyor plays a major role in Body Art. (→ Body, Insanity) The body becomes the image conveyor. In his actions Brus cut or spattered his body; Weibel had his body sewed up, and in Yoko Ono it is gradually exposed. Also Timm Ulrichs' *Erstes lebendes Kunstwerk* (first living artwork) of 1961 shakes the entire notion of sculpture. After the Second World War the classical categories of art may not have been destroyed, but they were forcefully called into question.

→ Tradition
(Space01)

Audioguide & APP

An audioguide is available to accompany the exhibition that offers 35 different reflections by experts in original soundtrack. The in-depth knowledge of each of the experts allows the viewer to adopt different viewpoints and to reflect on the theme of destruction in the individual works.

You will also find these commentaries on our iPads in the Needle, where further statements are also available as videos.

Supporting programme

(in German)

20.11.2014, 3 pm

Damage Control, free-of-charge guided tour for teachers through the exhibition at Kunsthaus Graz
Meeting point: Kunsthaus Graz

19.11.2014, 2–8 pm

Comprehensive programme on the exhibition on student day
More information on:
<http://www.museum-joanneum.at/studierendentag>

04.12.2014, 4 pm

Damage Control, guided tour with Gabi Gmeiner and Markus Waitschacher
in the exhibitions at the Kunsthaus Graz and BRUSEUM
Meeting point: Joanneumsviertel, Foyer

04.12.2014, 6 pm

'I'm good in sabotage', *Politicisation of art—Politics as Art*
Talk by Sabine Flach,
Professor of Modernism and Contemporary Art at the Karl-Franzens University Graz
Kunsthaus Graz, Needle
Free entrance!

23.01.2015, 4 pm

Damage Control, dialogue with Roman Grabner and Monika Holzer-Kernbichler
in the exhibitions at the Kunsthaus Graz and BRUSEUM
Meeting point: Kunsthaus Graz

13.02.2015, 2:30 pm

Damage Control, guided tour with Monika Holzer-Kernbichler
in the exhibition at the Kunsthaus Graz during *Wirbel in der Bubble*
23.01.2015, 2:30 pm
Meeting point: Kunsthaus Graz

Film programme

Within the context of the exhibition *Damage Control. Art and Destruction Since 1950* Kunsthaus Graz at Space04 is showing free-of-charge the following films:

19.11.2014, 7 pm

Film evening with Christof Elpons,
Godzilla. The Original
Ishirō Honda: *Godzilla*, 1954
(96 min)

16.12.2014, 6 pm

Introduction: Helmut Konrad
Bruce Conner: *Crossroads*, 1976
(36 min)
The Otolith Group: *The Radiant*, 2012 (64:14 min)

13.01.2015, 6 pm

Introduction: Rasmus Nielsen,
Superflex (per Video)
Superflex: *Burning Car*, 2008
(11 min)
Superflex: *Flooded McDonald's*, 2009 (21 min)
Ant Farm: *Media Burn*, 1975
(23:02 min)

10.02.2015, 6 pm

Introduction: Roman Grabner
Doug Aitken: *House*, 2010
(8:36 min)
Harun Farocki: *Nicht löschesbares Feuer*, 1969 (25 min)
VALIE EXPORT: ... *Remote ... Remote*, 1973 (10 min)

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