

The Fallen

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Abstract

The Fallen investigates public monuments as *archival infrastructures* that materialise and reproduce dominant narratives of masculinity, authority, and national identity. Engaging with the theme of “encounters in the archive,” the project examines how images of decapitated statues constitute a dispersed archive of rupture—documents that reveal the instability of the historical fantasies these monuments were built to sustain. Rather than treating the archive as a static repository, the work approaches it as a site of conflict where meaning is continually reshaped through acts of destruction, displacement, and reconfiguration.

The project begins with archival photographs of damaged monuments, which are then intervened through collage with fragments of exuberant, non—human—shaped nature. These vegetal and avian presences introduce a speculative counter—archive, imagining what emerges when monumental symbols of patriarchal permanence are re-situated within organic forces that resist human control. The collaged images are transferred onto second-hand porcelain plates—objects marked by domesticity, intimacy, and prior use—before being deliberately broken and repaired using *kintsugi*. This process foregrounds fracture as a method of artistic research: the cracks become visible lines of inquiry that expose the ideological tensions embedded in the archival image.

Through this material and conceptual methodology, *The Fallen* proposes that artistic knowledge can arise from processes of rupture, rewilding, and repair. The project reconsiders the archive as an evolving structure shaped by conflict, care, and imaginative reconfiguration, offering new ways to understand the politics of representation and the fragility of the narratives that monuments seek to preserve.

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The Fallen approaches monuments as archival infrastructures structures that materialise and reproduce narratives of authority, national identity and historical permanence. Across different geographies and periods, these monuments consistently portray male bodies, reiterating a visual code of hegemonic representation: elevated stances, heroic gestures, militaristic clothing and monumental scale. Through this repetition, the male figure becomes a vehicle for an imposed image of stability and dominance an official representation crafted to

naturalise particular hierarchies. In this project, the encounter with the archive unfolds not in institutional repositories but in the charged spaces where these monuments have been contested, damaged or dismantled.¹

The archival images I work with photographs of decapitated, vandalised or partially destroyed statues form a dispersed archive of rupture. Among them are classical fragments from Thessaloniki, displaced imperial monuments preserved in Berlin, toppled political effigies from Iraq and colonial figures attacked in public space. These images document moments when the authority of the monument has faltered, when its claim to permanence has been interrupted by collective frustration, political dissent or historical re-evaluation. They are affective documents of conflict: gestures of refusal that expose the fragility of the narratives the monument was erected to uphold. They reveal that the archive is not a stable container of memory but a site of negotiation, where meaning is continually reshaped through acts of destruction, displacement and appropriation.²

Before being transferred onto porcelain plates, these archival images undergo a process of collaging in which fragments of exuberant, non-human-shaped nature dense foliage, vegetal forms and avian silhouettes are interwoven with the broken bodies of the statues. This intervention introduces a speculative dimension: it imagines what might emerge when the monumental is released from its ideological weight and allowed to coexist with organic forces that have not been shaped by human intention. The presence of this unruly nature does not function as preservation but as transformation. It proposes a counter-archive in which the monument is no longer a symbol of permanence but a material open to decay, reinvention and ecological entanglement. These vegetal and animal presences act as agents of rewilding, suggesting that the collapse of patriarchal symbols may create space for other forms of life, other narratives, other futures.³

Transferring these collaged images onto porcelain plates introduces a further shift in scale and meaning. Porcelain, with its connotations of fragility, care and commemoration, stands in stark contrast to the monumental and masculine coding of the statues. Plates often function as objects that memorialise events or figures, yet in *The Fallen* this commemorative logic is unsettled: the plates are deliberately fractured and then repaired using *kintsugi*. This process creates a visual and conceptual tension: the break interrupts the authority of the image, while the golden seams refuse the possibility of returning to an intact narrative. My decision to work with *kintsugi* is informed by a historical and aesthetic understanding of the practice, in which visible repair does not aim to restore an earlier state but instead reveals the temporality of damage. Rather than a technique of restoration, *kintsugi* introduces a material ethics that acknowledges fracture as constitutive of the object and as an opportunity to reconfigure its meaning. Instead of preserving the monument, the repaired plate evokes transformation suggesting that the fall of these symbols of power opens a space for reinterpreting their histories. Through this material tension, porcelain becomes an area where memory is activated not through celebration, but through the visible traces of rupture and repair.⁴

The deliberate breaking of the plates is both an act of destruction and a method of enquiry. Fracture becomes a way of thinking through the archive revealing its seams, its ideological tensions, its points of vulnerability. Breaking the plates interrupts the authority of the image, exposing the instability of the narratives embedded within it. The subsequent repair using *kintsugi* does not restore the image to wholeness; instead, the golden veins highlight the impossibility of returning to an unbroken narrative. The philosophy behind *kintsugi* embracing damage as part of an object's history rather than concealing it resonates with the conceptual core of the project. It creates a visual conflict: the broken monument, symbol of fallen power, is repaired through a technique rooted in care, patience and acknowledgement of fragility. This tension activates memory, making visible the violence that shaped these symbols and the historical processes that led to their collapse.

In *The Fallen*, *kintsugi* becomes more than a technique; it becomes a conceptual hinge. It proposes a form of repair that does not erase violence but insists on its visibility. The repaired surfaces suggest that histories of authority and domination can be re-read through their fractures, and that the act of repair can make space for critical reflection. The golden seams do not heal the monument they expose the wound, marking the point where power falters and where new interpretations can emerge.⁵

The Fallen suggests that encounters with the archive are not only preservational but also violent, affective and transformative. The presence of unruly nature within the fractured monuments generates a speculative space: a vision of what these symbols might become once their authority collapses. Here, masculinity is no longer an immutable monolith but a fragile, contested and continually reconstructed terrain one that, like the repaired plates, carries its fractures openly.

The work proposes that artistic research can emerge from processes of rupture, displacement and repair. By engaging with archival images through collage, destruction and *kintsugi*, *The Fallen* demonstrates how acts of intervention can generate new understandings of history, identity and the politics of representation. This is not an attempt to “correct” the archive but to inhabit its fractures, to explore how symbols of power fall and what remains after their collapse. The project positions the archive not as a fixed repository but as an evolving structure shaped by conflict, care and the imaginative possibilities that arise when dominant narratives fall apart.

Footnotes

1 Gamboni, Dario. *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution*. London: Reaktion Books. 1997.

2 Schacter, Daniel. *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin. 2001.

3 Segato, Rita Laura. *Crítica de la colonialidad en ocho ensayos*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo. 2013.

4 Bartlett, Christy. “A Tearoom View of Mended Ceramics”. In *Flickwerk: The Aesthetics of Mended Japanese Ceramics*. Ithaca/Munich: Cornell University/Museum für Lackkunst. 2008.

5 Kemske, Bonnie. *Kintsugi: The Poetic Mend*. London: Herbert Press, 2021.