



Painting Ruins – Ruined Paintings (Acts of art in the frame of cinema and architecture) **Sam Spurr**

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When I first saw the paintings of Mason Kimber, I was assailed by images from a film I had seen decades prior and long forgotten. The plot of *The Belly of and Architect* eluded me at the time – my memory was like a film reel that had been chopped and thrown up in the air; a potent series of screenshots juxtaposing Roman statues, elaborate interiors, Grecian columns and rolls of architectural drawings. The bodies in these images were fixed and mute, subsumed by the spaces within which they posed. It is a film by Peter Greenaway, who is often described as making films like paintings, and beloved by architects for his preoccupation with creative genius. Amongst the ruins of my memory, the film remains as a kind of cinematic collision between architecture and art.

Ruins are fragments; they suggest past and future wholes. In the same way, Kimber's paintings are fragmentary both in material form and compositional strategy. They hold literal ruins as well as metaphorical ones, with recurring motifs from ancient Rome that serve as semiotic stand-ins for the past. In *NEW16*, she shows larger works on canvas as well as the smaller frescos on board that he has become known for. Each painting maps Kimber's own history: classical busts from his residency at the British School at Rome, architectural elements from a childhood home, and cinematic memories from his past works. The surfaces of these paintings hold the ruins of past ideas, as well as the suggestion of future ones. At times opaque shapes collide with one another, only for one to slip between the others as if underwater. Pastels scrape the skin of oil paint, and watercolours conceal and reveal past images. The frescos themselves are in a state of ruin – a struggle between paint and the texture of sand and plaster. These shattered surfaces are suggestive of forms, spaces and figures, but refuse direct narration.

Cinema has been an ongoing source of inspiration throughout Kimber's short but notable career. In past works this inspiration has taken the form of shifting, ephemeral imagery, evocative of events and atmospheres, hazy and deformed by memory. However in his more recent work, Kimber moves away from correlating painting and photography in the trajectory begun by Gerhard Richter. Instead, a collage aesthetic brings the cinematic in line with Kimber's fascination with architecture, an interest less in form than in spatial experience. This aesthetic is also what saves the work from sinking into nostalgic representation.

Architecture has traditionally reified photography for its ability to return a building back to its state as a drawing. In a photo one can focus on a static set of lines and form, devoid of the mess of change and movement brought by bodies and time. In contrast, cinema embraces spatial complexity, taking architecture away from the image and into experience.

Our experiences of spaces do not unwind like a film reel, but instead layer, fold and merge. As we walk through the world, shifting geometries of images collect and accumulate around us in constant transformation. These fragmentary images are not only the ones we're in, but are made up of other images drawn from stories read, films seen, our fantasies and our histories overlaid.

When I recently re-watched the Greenaway film I discovered that many of my original memories were false – they came instead from other films or had been reshaped from my own Roman adventures.

Kimber's paintings conjure this phenomenon of experience in a single frame. Vision is not tamed and simplified by a single-point perspective, but multiplied and recombined. The viewer is drawn to ward each painting by a detail, only to move again to reconfigure the whole. The works are installed in order to heighten this process, with geometries extending beyond the frame and onto the gallery wall. A plane of colour sweeps from the wall to the floor inviting you to step forward. Inscribed lines suggest alternative interior on which the paintings have hung, or will hang. This produces an uncanny repetition of interiors that reverberate from the gallery walls and multiply like ghosts into the works themselves.

The ruin is a fetish few can resist. Ruins are open-ended, as if time had paused unsure of whether to go forward or back. The ruin is in itself an invitation to come in and complete it. Kimber's paintings embrace this quality of unfinished possibilities, and similarly they are a lure to speculation. Like ruins, what is so tantalizing about these paintings is that they make us world-makers, and in viewing them we rebuild them to our own fantasies.

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