

R U I N N A T I O N

K a r e n K e a n e y



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P r e f a c e

Since childhood, I have been interested in derelict and abandoned buildings. I feel incredibly drawn towards them; they fire my imagination and pique my curiosity, yet there is a profound sadness about them. Passing the many two-room farm cottages dotted around the Irish landscape, some with trees protruding from the chimneys, I always wonder who the last person was to close the door. My interest in the emotional connection with derelict buildings deepened through my studies. Researching buildings, their history, and the experiences they have had also connects me as a designer to the building on a deeper level. It has helped me to communicate the history of the building through the redesign process.

I n t r o d u c t i o n

Derelict, abandoned, and crumbling buildings are all around us; they are relics of the past. Reminders of different times, good and bad. They make up a significant part of both urban and rural landscapes. They are landmarks of our history, both physically and psychologically. In subsequent sections of this research paper, a thorough elucidation of Urbexers (Infiltration.org, 2023) will be provided. However, at this juncture, it is imperative to underscore that the ascent of the Urbex movement clearly illustrates people's fascination with these buildings, so much so that they have created a subculture, with television shows on the subject. Books and poetry have been published about ruins, they have been the main character in movies and yet have no lines. They have represented the fall of humanity in many popular TV series, visions of cities devoid of life triggering our imaginations into overdrive. They have inspired painters, sculptors and photographers who have produced incredible work from their dishevelled muse. The relevance of modern-day ruins lies in their ability to teach us about the past, inspire new forms of art and design, and remind us of the importance of our cultural heritage and the environment.

D e l v i n g i n t o A b a n d o n e d R e m a i n s

R e s e a r c h Q u e s t i o n s

This research paper examines our relationship with modern-day ruins from the 20th and 21st centuries. It investigates the human empathic, melancholic, and artistic connection with derelict and abandoned buildings and takes a closer look at their value and our fascination with them.

How do our perceptions of the value of these buildings evolve once they are abandoned and begin to deteriorate?

Considering the divergence in individuals' emotional responses to ruins, what underlying factors contribute to the emergence of a melancholic connection specifically associated with these architectural remnants?

This tripartite research comprises theoretical enquiries, case studies and practice-based experimentations. The first part consists of desktop research with an in-depth literature review using theoretical resources in books, academic journals,

and talks. This part includes case studies on a broad and diverse range of artists who have connected with derelict and abandoned sites in their practice and investigates their processes and analyses their findings. Phase two consists of art-based research with a focus on visual arts and photography. The use of photography in research dates back to 1872 when Darwin (Darwin, 2018) successfully used photography in his study of 'Expression and Emotions in Man and Animal'. Images can reveal insights into the interpretative side of research, they contain vast amounts of visual information, are emotive and have a language of their own. The photographic series accompanying this research tests the theory that decaying spaces create connection by evoking emotional responses and have artistic and creative value. The use of reflexive photography allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of their positionality in the research process, and to explore how personal experiences and biases may influence the creative process. In the final phase, the research is collated in a printed photographic exhibition and installation to accompany the research project.

T h e A r t o f t h e R u i n

Looking at abandoned buildings, we often see crumbling walls, broken windows, and missing roof tiles. Eventually, nature reclaims its territory, ivy starts to weave through walls, birds move in, and insects thrive among the remnants. Materials will begin to change and transform physically; mould will grow, and moss will spread. Although unkempt and dishevelled, this decaying aesthetic has an element of beauty. Peeling paint and crumbling timbers, slowly reveal the alluring material manifestation of time, as nature, and the elements gradually unpick the makings of man. Eventually, an architectural ruin is born. The term 'ruin' draws negative connotations, ruins are often seen as a blight on the landscape. However, this disorder and fragmented sensuality in a very orderly world has its appeal. In his book 'Industrial Ruins', Tim Edensor argues that over-design, demolition, and replacement of derelict buildings lead to a sterile, banal urban landscape. Through appreciation and acceptance of decay in the architectural environment we create "other ways for using and reading the city, for making space in individual ways, creating paths and performing otherwise, sensing, fantasizing and desiring in the city." (2005, p171) However, the concept of connecting and allowing ruins to just be, conflicts with the idea of the adaptive reuse of buildings, an approach that is very much at the forefront of today's environmentally conscious society.

Deeper thinking happens, perhaps subconsciously, when we look at ruins. Imagining the future and the unavoidable ageing processes create a narrative and a connection to the ruin, superimposing our mortality onto the building. Imagining a building when it was once alive with people, light and life, but experiencing it in a state of ruin and decay is melancholic, symbolic of our mortality. This can be interpreted as a metaphor for human life. A building goes through the same life-changing processes as humans, plants and animals, from conception to death. Professor Jonathan Hill (2019, p294) claims that ruins are a 'stimulus to the imagination, a ruin's incomplete and broken forms expand architecture's allegorical and metaphorical potential'. Hill describes ruins as antecedents to change, full of memory but with the potential for change and new memory-making. This idea gives value and frames the ruin as a way to look back into the past and simultaneously look forward to the future, creating a portal to each, full of imagined possibilities. When buildings are broken and fragmented, we allow ourselves to fill in the blank spaces. Similarly, Caitlin DeSilvey (2017, p37) states that 'degraded artefacts can contribute to alternative interpretive possibilities, even as they remain caught up in dynamic processes of decay and disarticulation.' These interpretative possibilities are as dynamic and exciting as the transformations made by natural material alterations occurring through decay.

Edensor argues the value of ruins as places of recreation and creativity. He states that these spaces are 'under-determined by the usually over-prescribed official or appropriate uses, the looseness of ruined spaces permits a wide range of practices.' (2005, p21). Edensor discusses the uses of ruins as the venue for raves, parties, drug taking and other illicit activities, out of the prying eyes of today's closely surveyed society. These decaying spaces are a sidestep out of social norms, on the fringes, not quite dead but not entirely living, a secret netherworld.

Founded by Jeff Chapman (Infiltration.org, 2023) in Toronto in the mid-1990s, the Urbex movement is a gathering of urban explorers. *Urbexers* seek out abandoned buildings for the thrill of discovering something new and usually to document their experiences. Chapman wrote a user guide for the Urbex community, 'Access All Areas; A Users Guide to the Art of Urban Exploration,' published after his untimely death in 2005. He also created an online website to connect Urbex explorers across the world. The website, 'Infiltration', also produced a zine. The website has been maintained since Chapman's death, and the forum remains active today. Urbex can be categorised as a genre within the

art world. Urbexer's document their experiences in these abandoned and derelict spaces using video, photography, and storytelling as their artistic media. The manifesto of these explorers is to *take only photographs and leave only footprints*. Respectful to the ruins, they see themselves as preservers of history, briefly occupying the space between the living and the dead. The photographs created by the Urban Explorers rarely feature the living; this further emphasises the abandonment. This raises the question; could the missing fragment of the broken building be human life? Urbexers connect worldwide online and in order to protect these abandoned spaces, rarely divulge information such as the location and accessibility of abandoned sites to those outside of their inner circle.

"Go find the nether places between the day and the night where the walls are thin, and you can, for a moment, step outside of time."

Romany WG (2012, p85)

Urbexers are not the only artists that form connections with ruins; visual artists and writers have used ruins as inspiration for hundreds of years. The theorist, artist and architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi (Woodward, 2002) produced etchings of several ancient Roman ruins in the 1700s. These etchings still conjure images of ancient Rome today, creating connections to the past through a snapshot in time. Joseph Michael Gandy (Woodward, 2002) painted several of Sir John Soane's (Woodward, 2002) buildings fantasised as ruins. These paintings were commissioned by Soane, who was inspired by ancient ruins. Artwork using derelict and abandoned sites is diverse and inspirational. In the next section, we will look at examples of 21st-century artists that have connected with ruins through their practice.

R u i n R e i m a g i n e r s

M i r u K i m

While studying for her MFA in New York in the early 2000s, Miru Kim (mirukim.com, 2023) became fascinated with the Urbex movement and began photographing her discoveries. Although her images were full of mood and intrigue, she felt something was missing. Kim started by photographing herself in these decaying spaces; she chose to do so without clothing to appear

timeless, without any cultural affiliations, allowing an intimate physical connection with the ruins (Images 1 & 2). While creating the images, Kim felt the fragility of the buildings, some were modern-day ruins, and she was struck by how quickly decay and disintegration occur. Choosing to create images nude mirrors this fragility and vulnerability, which is evident in most of her work. The image below (Image 1), taken in the Paris Catacombs, an underground series of disused tunnels and limestone quarries, where the bones of 6 million people lie, creates a strangeness, a sort of underground purgatory. 'I like doing more than exploring these spaces; I feel an obligation to animate and humanise these spaces continually in order to preserve their memories in a creative way before they are lost forever' (Kim, 2008). The discarded human remains in the Catacombs were moved there between the 17 and 1800s due to overcrowding in Parisian cemeteries. The bodies of the dead, much like ruins, were fragmented and scattered throughout the catacombs, creating a city of the dead in the underground ruin.

Part of Kim's work involves her overcoming her fears as a method of connection with her audience; she has stated that 'it's beyond therapeutic. I do this through art because I identify with countless other people who go through the emotions of overcoming fears' (Kim, 2017). The ruins connect people; they are a metaphor for our ultimate demise, the one inevitable and fearful part of life that we must all face in the future.



Image 1. Miru Kim, Catacombs, Paris (Kim, 2008)

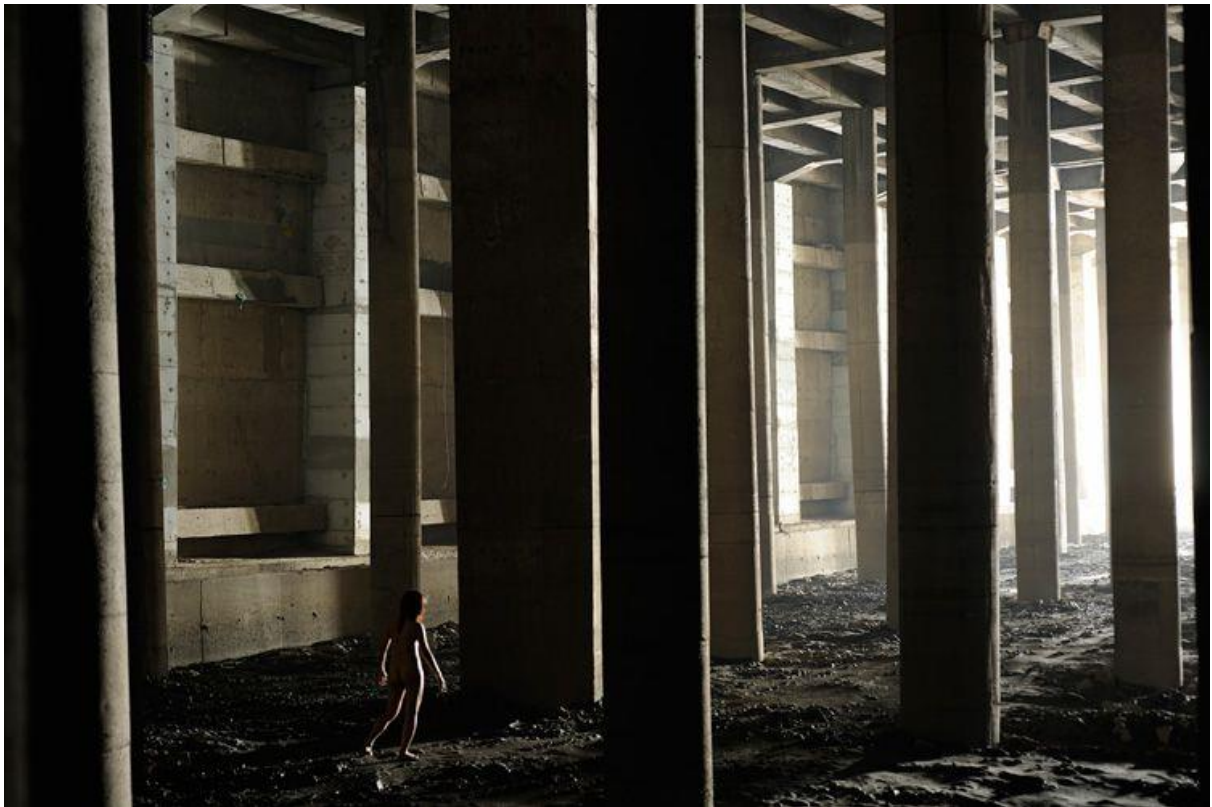


Image 2. 'Naked City Spleen'(Kim, 2008)

R o g e r H i o r n s , ' S e i z u r e '

In 2008 contemporary artist Roger Hiorns (royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/name/roger-hiorns-ra, 2023) was commissioned by Artangel and the Jerwood Charitable Foundation to transform a derelict council bedsit in London into a piece of art. The building was post-war and earmarked for demolition. The work titled 'Seizure' resulted from Hiorn's years of working with copper sulphate; he saw this installation as a scientific art experiment with an uncertain outcome. Although he was experienced and familiar with copper sulphate, he was unsure how it would react with the building fabric.

The installation was created using approximately 87,000 litres of boiling liquid copper sulphate poured into the abandoned bedsit. The excess liquid was pumped out, and the remnants were left to crystallise, creating an ethereal and glimmering crystal growth, covering all the surfaces in the building (Image 3). This process allowed the bedsit to be reborn into something new. 'Maybe there's a psycho-sexual element; in the early days, I talked about introducing a liquid in the building, and the host, the environment is seeded, and then the crystal grows out. It's an aggressive process. Maybe it's not so much sexual, but to do with the idea of agency, impregnation, and growth. It involves the birthing of an object.' (Hiorns, 2008)

The installation was the last physical alteration to be made to the bedsit; similarities can be drawn to human embalming or mummification processes of preservation as well as the idea of impregnation and reproduction. The installation saved the bedsit from its imminent demolition as it was decided to retain the work. It was extracted from the bedsit in February 2011, which saw one wall of the bedsit removed before the whole structure was pulled out of the building using heavy machinery. 'Seizure' was relocated to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, where it is open to the public. The installation is now housed in a new concrete structure designed by Adam Khan Architects. The work earned Hiorns a nomination for the Turner Prize in 2009.

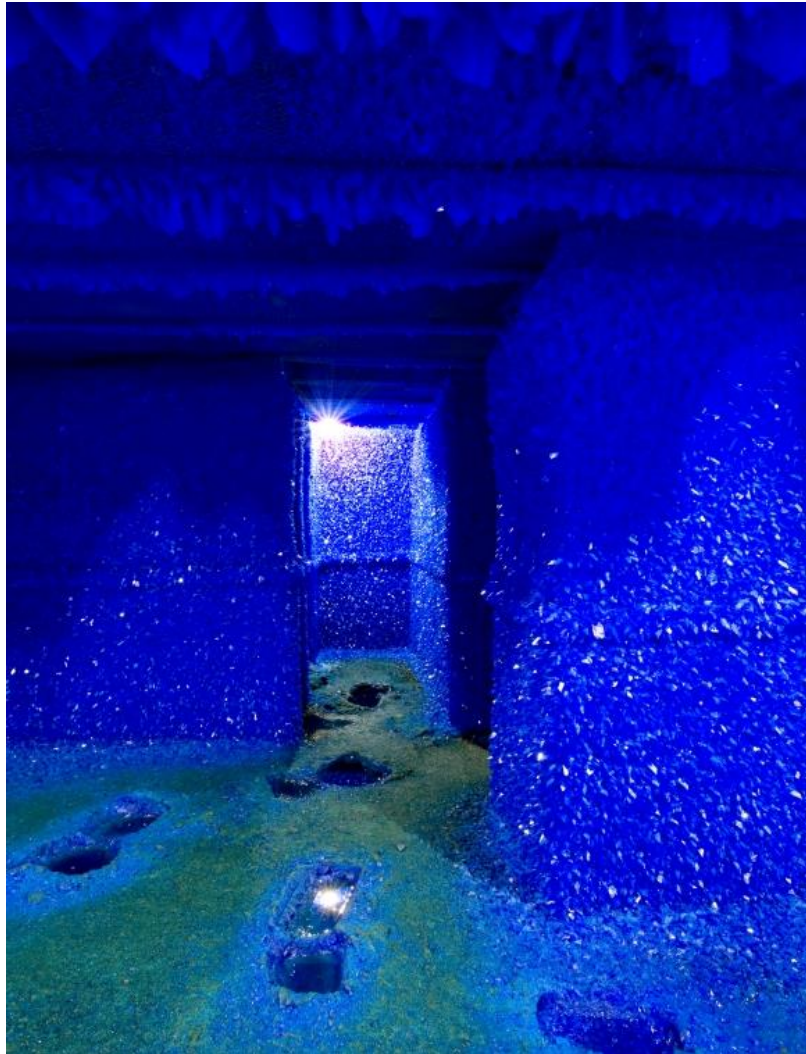


Image 3. Roger Hiorns, Seizure (Leith, M, 2008)

L o u i s e K W i l s o n ' s ' A R e c o r d o f F e a r

Orford Ness (Image 4) on the Suffolk coast in England is home to a derelict military site dating back to 1913. This top-secret testing site was operated during the 1st and 2nd world wars and was occupied by military personnel until 1973. The site is now abandoned, and the strange military structures sit in a juxtaposition to the natural beauty of Orford Ness. The National Trust acquired it in 1993, and the decision to provide palliative care for the derelict site was taken. Only one lab of the six on the site, is open to the public, the remaining five have exterior access only with guided tours.

The Trust invited several artists to capture the military base as it stands today. Artist Louise K Wilson's (lkwilson.org) 'A Record of Fear,' *created* in 2005, uses sensitive sound recording equipment carefully placed at the site to make her

auditory artwork. The Exmoor Choir were also recorded by Wilson as part of her work at the site. “What is revealed is a complex landscape of quiet cacophony, ruin and beauty where Orford Ness structures previously hushed its inner workings. Now, these buildings are returned to nature, the National Trust’s policy of ‘continued ruination,’ situated across from a town whose residents could only speculate about the site’s activities. Like a desert or island, destructive potential churned at a distance.” (Wilson, 2005).

There is a poignancy to inviting the artists to connect with the abandoned site at Orford Ness. As the National Trust has decided to provide palliative care for the site, the artist’s work can be interpreted as a memorial or an obituary for the dying site, as well as a creative way to document it as a piece of architectural history. Christopher Woodward argues that when ‘a ruins owner is guided by an artistic vision that it can be opened to the public with its strange magic undiluted’ (Woodward, p223). This alternative way to present historic sites in their raw, neglected state offers a new perspective to the visitor, allowing them to fill in the blank spaces with their own narrative.



Image 4. Orford Ness (Mann D, 2007)

Scott Hocking 'RELICS'

Scott Hocking (Scotthocking.com, 2023) is a contemporary American artist known for his site-specific installations, sculptures, and photographs exploring memory, decay, and transformation. Hocking's work often involves creating large-scale installations in abandoned or forgotten spaces, such as derelict buildings, industrial sites, and natural landscapes. One of Hocking's notable works is "Relics," which was first conceived in 2001. The RELICS installation tells the story of the 300-year history of Detroit city through found discarded objects. 400 degrading and decaying man-made objects were organised into grid-like reliquary walls, building a natural history museum of the future. It was a labour-intensive creative collaboration with fellow artist Clinton Snider. The installation was first exhibited at the Detroit Institute of Arts and has been reconfigured site specifically multiple times.

Another notable installation in the series is "Zug Island Relics," (Scotthocking.com, 2012) which was created in 2012 in an abandoned warehouse in Detroit. For this installation, Hocking collected objects that had been left behind on Zug Island, a derelict industrial site located on the Detroit River. The installation featured a variety of items, including decaying industrial equipment, tools, and personal belongings, all of which had been discarded or abandoned. Through this installation, Hocking explored the history of industrialisation in Detroit and the impact it has had on the surrounding environment. The objects themselves are remnants of a bygone era of industrial production, but they also serve as symbols of the human cost of that production, as many of them were discarded by workers who were forced to leave their homes and communities due to pollution and other environmental hazards. Through "Zug Island Relics," Hocking draws attention to the ongoing environmental and social issues facing Detroit and other industrial cities and asks viewers to consider how our built environment shapes our lives and identities. The installation is a powerful commentary on the legacy of industrialisation and its ongoing impact on communities and ecosystems.

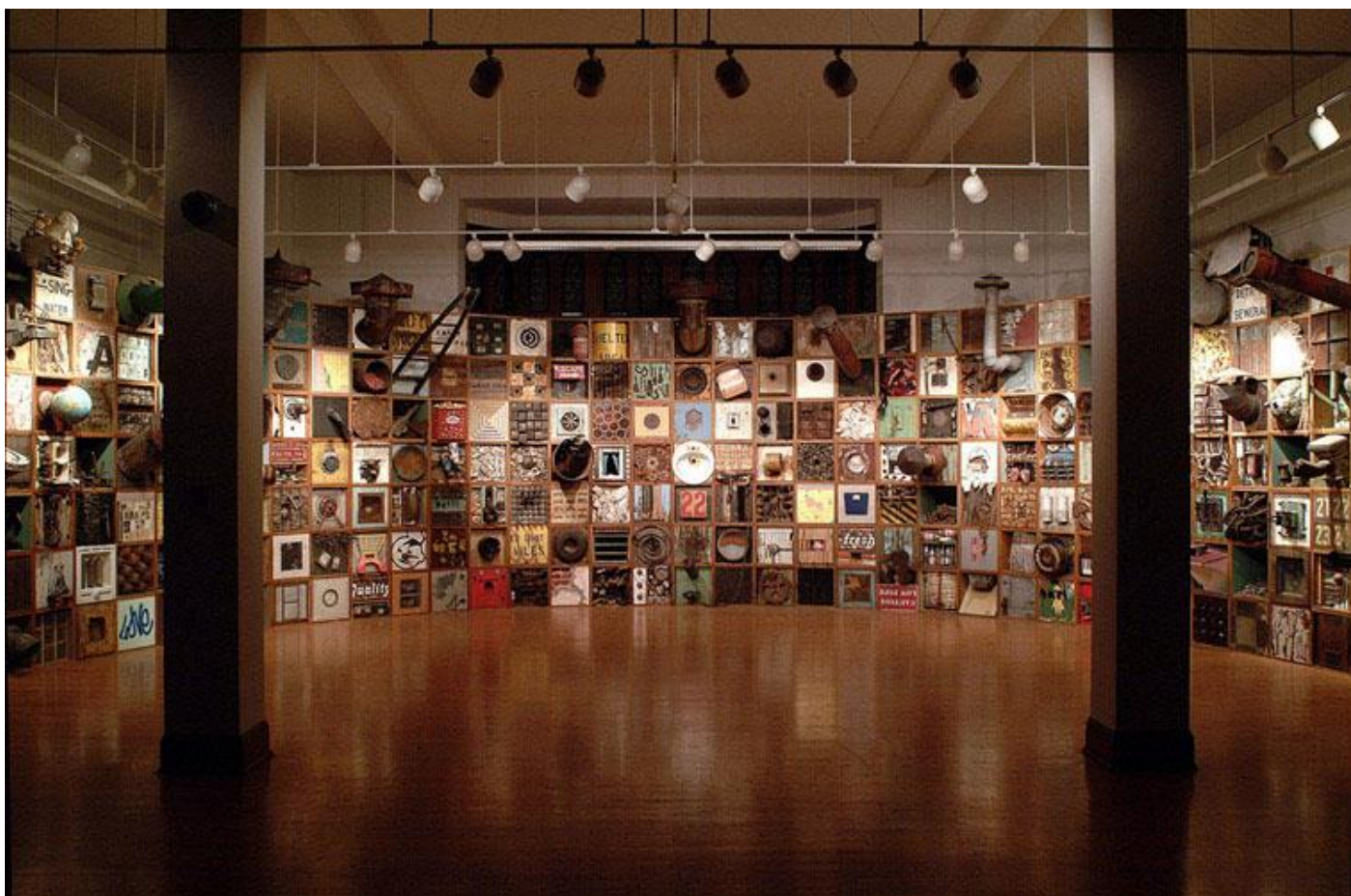


Image 5, RELICS (Hocking S, 2001)

Superflex

Superflex is a Danish art collective that was founded in 1993 by Jakob Fenger, Bjørnstjerne Christiansen, and Rasmus Rosengren Nielsen (Superflex.net, 2023). The group creates works that aim to challenge the conventional boundaries of art, focusing on social and economic issues, such as consumerism, global capitalism, and climate change. Their film work titled 'Flooded McDonalds' (Superflex.net, 2009) sees a full-size replica of a McDonald's restaurant slowly filling with water. At the start of the film the scene is set, we see the restaurant which was created as if it were fully functional, complete with burgers and fries, but devoid of humans. The film sees water undramatically enter the restaurant from an unknown source underneath a door, as it does the destruction and ruination of the restaurant begins. The water slowly rises as the restaurant and its contents are gradually submerged in a post-apocalyptic scene. The film is filled with symbolism, McDonald's is the largest fast-food chain in the world, an icon and a constant that creates a global language for the film. We see Ronald McDonald first bob

around comically before he falls over into the water like a felled protagonist dictator. The slow rising of the water with debris floating around mimics the world's rising water levels, climate disasters and the pollution of our oceans. Towards the end of the film, we expect everything to stop, however, the plastics and pollution keep moving around in the water, a metaphor for life carrying on without us and the mess we leave behind.



Image 6, Flooded McDonald's. (Superflex, 2009)

These case studies, although diverse in terms of methodology are analogous. Several of the works have taken the site and inserted human beings into it. Kim inserts herself into the work, her pure form against the harsh background somehow softens it and pulls us, the viewers, closer into the space. It becomes otherworldly but somehow, we connect with it, it seems accessible, we can go there. Hiorns, by introducing this metamorphic, natural substance into the building, impregnating the man-made surfaces, created an unearthly space. Inviting the public inside the art installation, disturbed the pure crystal forms, collectively participating in their destruction by simply walking over them. Wilson's recordings are haunting, listening to the recording and viewing images of the site, we open the door to a metaphysical space, stepping outside of reality and into the nether. Hocking and Superflex both use every day man-made objects in ruins to make a statement about humanity and its impact on the world.

Although diverse there are commonalities, each work uses the space as a portal to a transient place, not living, not dead but somewhere in between and there are hints of pleasure in the pain in each. Another nuanced aspect is a sense of collective mourning that involves a balance of acknowledging and experiencing the pain and sadness of loss, while also celebrating the life and legacy of the ruin. Rather than focusing solely on the negative aspects of the decay and dereliction, celebratory collective mourning recognises the positive contributions and value of the ruin in its current state. In his philosophical enquiry into the 'Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful', Burke (Burke & Womersley, 2004) meditates on the fact that although no one would ever wish for the destruction of London, people would delight in the spectacle of its destruction if it were to take place. 'There is no spectacle we so eagerly pursue, as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity; so that whether the misfortunes before our eyes, or whether they are turned back into history, it always touches with delight' (Burke & Womersley, p91). Burke elaborates on this notion stating that our enjoyment of ruins through a particular disposition towards compassion, 'the bond of sympathy' is instilled in us to unite society.

L i f e t h r o u g h a l e n s .

Art-based research methods recognise that research is not just about gathering information or data, but also involves the active participation and engagement of the researcher, the research participants and/or the audience. Reflexive photography is a research method that involves using photography to document and explore the researcher's subjective experience of their research process. Employing this method, photographs are taken of the research environment, these images are then analysed to understand the subjective experience of the process, and to explore the relationship between the researcher, the research subject, and the context. The photographs are then shared with the audience so they can connect with the ruin and have their own individual experience.

Three abandoned buildings were used as part of the research: a farmhouse, a cinema, and a cottage. On the first visit, I record the interesting features, objects, feelings and sounds at the site. The photographs captured were born out of introspection within the depicted environment. Consequently, the resulting photography portrays not a mere reflection of reality, but rather a distinct introspective gaze. It intricately weaves together a layered portrait of

the building's past, conveyed through remnants of the decay, and my own perspective, conveyed through deliberate positioning and selective focus on particular elements. The ruined buildings were left largely untouched, drawing on inspiration from the site, and elements of humanity were either added or emphasised in the photographs.

Photography

The Farmhouse



Image 7. The Farmhouse Parlour, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

The Last Supper

McDonald's, an internationally renowned brand, is easily identifiable across the globe. However, when we encounter a Happy Meal nestled within a dilapidated structure, a striking irony and contrast emerge, emphasising the stark disparity between the realm of consumerism and the realm of decay. This intriguing interplay can be perceived as a commentary on the superficial nature of our culture, underscoring the significance of forging profound connections with the world surrounding us.



Image 8. The Farmhouse Stair, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Footsteps

These shoes were left behind by the lady that once lived in the now derelict house. The shoes evoke a sense of melancholy and a strong human connection to ruins. They serve as a reminder of the past, a symbol of abandonment, they speak to the universal human experience of loss.



Image 9. The Farmhouse Stair, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Breathe

In this image we are drawn to the carefully positioned balloons on the staircase, they serve as a visual manifestation of life itself. Their delicate composition stands in stark contrast to the prevailing atmosphere of decay and dilapidation, serving as a poignant reminder of the ephemeral nature of human existence.



Image 10, The Farmhouse Parlour, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Now the drugs don't work...

All around us are buildings abandoned, derelict and decaying, slowly dying, yet in Ireland in 2023 there is a housing crisis and increasing homelessness. There is a juxtaposition between the attempt to sustain life, symbolised by the bottle of pills, and the slow decay of the building, forces pulling in opposite directions.



Image 11. The Farmhouse Parlour, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Reading between the ruins

Books left behind in the derelict building are a reminder of the decay and loss that is inherent in the passage of time. They can be a poignant symbol of the impermanence of all things and can evoke a sense of melancholy for the loss of knowledge, ideas, and experiences that they represent.



Image 12. The Farmhouse Clocks, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Time

The clocks were found dispersed throughout the derelict house. They are symbolic of the passing of time and suggest the impermanence of humanity, representing a bygone era, a time when the building was once alive with people. The clocks, now stopped, suggest a finality to that era, as if time has moved on and left the building and its clocks behind.



Image 13. The Farmhouse Batteries, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Low Battery

Symbolically, the used and discarded batteries in the photograph can be interpreted as metaphors for drained energy, exhausted resources, or even forgotten aspirations. Their lifeless state contrasts starkly with the surrounding ruin, which itself stands as a testament to the passage of time and the erosion of human achievements. The historical, environmental, and symbolic dimensions inherent in such an image elicit contemplation on the ephemerality of human endeavours, the importance of sustainable practices, and the deeper connection needed between humanity and its surroundings.

The Cottage



Image 14, The Cottage Bedroom, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Sunday Best

The shirt in the image has never been worn. It has been lying in the derelict house, untouched for over 35 years. Perhaps it was intended as the shirt the owner was to be laid out in. The material in the shirt has started to change and the pure white cotton has been stained as nature starts to reclaim the building and all of its contents.



Image 15. The Cottage Lounge, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

One for the road

The bottles in this image were left here after the wake of the man who lived here 35 years ago. Ruins can evoke a sense of collective mourning that involves a balance of acknowledging and experiencing the pain and sadness of loss, while also celebrating the life and legacy of the ruin. Rather than focusing solely on the negative aspects of the decay and dereliction, celebratory collective mourning recognises the positive contributions and value of the ruin in its current state.

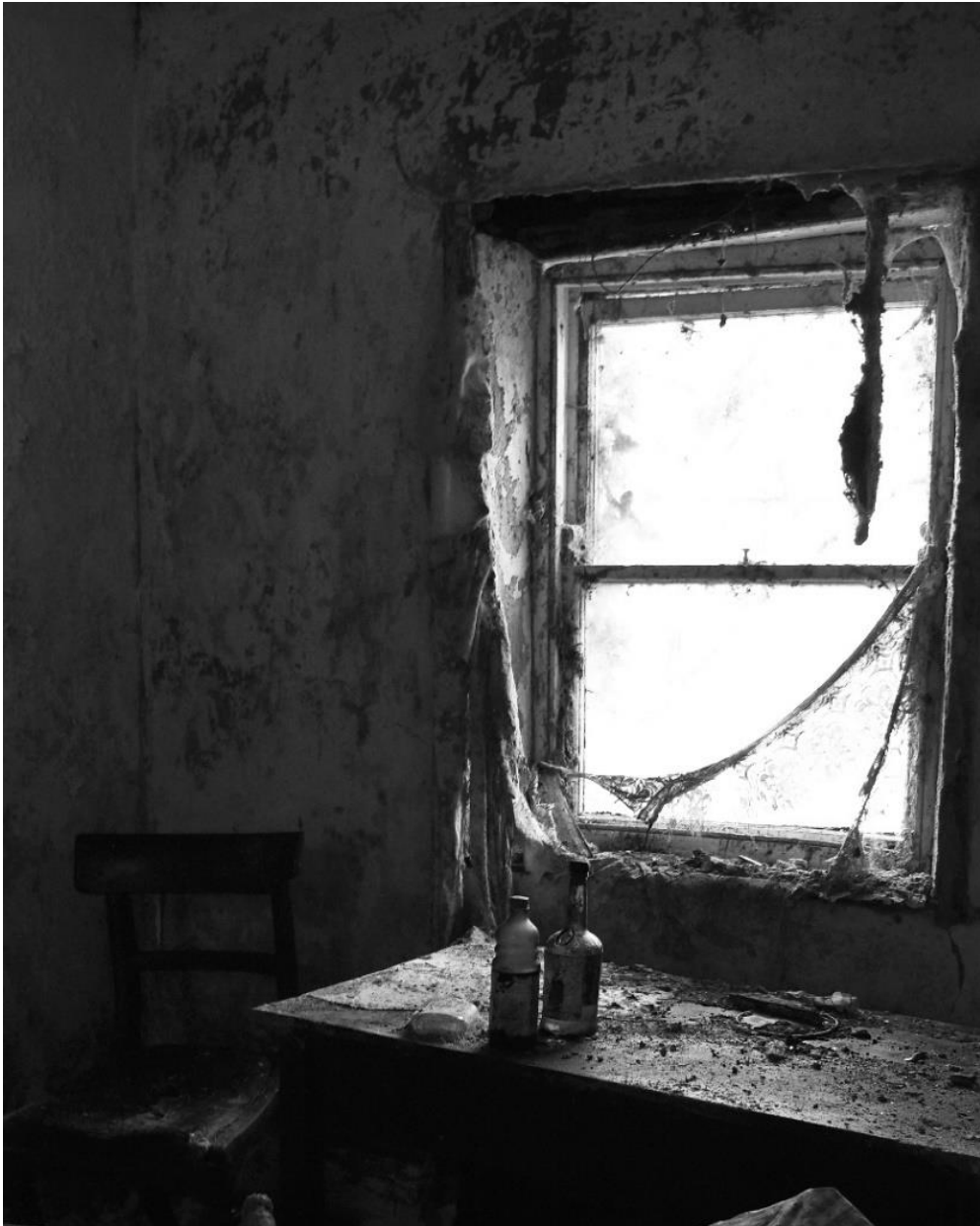


Image 16. The Cottage Lounge, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Where the light gets in

A contrast between decay and resilience, darkness and light which invites contemplation about the transient nature of human existence, reminding us that even in desolation, fragments of light and hope can still find a way to seep through. The image captures a poignant moment, inviting viewers to reflect on the ephemeral nature of existence and the enduring power of light, even in the darkest of places.



Image 17. The Cottage Lounge, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Life through a lens

Deeper thinking happens, perhaps subconsciously, when we look at ruins. Imagining the future and the unavoidable ageing processes create a narrative and a melancholic connection to the ruin, superimposing our mortality onto the building. Through the lens of ruins, we are compelled to delve deeper into the complexities of human existence, prompting introspection, and sparking a greater appreciation for the fleeting moments of beauty and significance that punctuate our lives.



Image 18. The Cottage Hall, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

The Passageway

The hallway is a passage between spaces, a non-space of sorts. Ruins are also in between spaces, they occupy the space between the living and the dead, a glimpse into the past and a hint to the inevitable future.



Image 19. The Cottage Threshold, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Threshold

The poignancy of the threshold of a derelict house lies in its ability to evoke a sense of transition, decay, possibility, and nostalgia. It represents both an ending and a beginning and is a powerful symbol of the human experience of impermanence. It is where the human connection with the building begins and ends.



Image 20. The Cottage Hall, County Leitrim (K.K. 2023)

Documenting the forgotten

Through the inclusion of the camera within the photograph, the photographer signals her presence and involvement in the act of documentation, positioning herself as an active participant in the exploration and interpretation of the abandoned house. This subtle inclusion underscores the photographer's role as an interpreter of the forgotten, breathing life into the abandoned space and imbuing it with her own perspective and artistic vision.

The Cinema



Image 21. The Cinema Entrance, County Sligo (K.K. 2023)

Sweet or Salty?

The photograph shows us the abandoned cinema entrance, its once lively atmosphere now frozen in a state of neglect. The discarded popcorn symbolising the absence of bustling moviegoers. This visual composition evokes contemplation on the temporal nature of human activities and the evocative power of abandoned spaces and the fleeting nature of cultural engagements.



Image 22. The Cinema Projector Room, County Sligo (K.K. 2023)

Cut

The empty film reels found in the abandoned cinema transcends mere visual representation. Nostalgia, cultural heritage, and the evolution of technology converge to evoke a profound sense of longing, cultural significance, and reflections on the passage of time. This reflection prompts us to acknowledge the importance of preserving our cultural heritage and recognising the dynamic nature of humanity and the artistic mediums that encapsulate them.



Image 23. The Cinema, County Sligo (K.K. 2023)

Movie night

Through the lens of the camera, the image reveals the abandoned cinema, its back wall noticeably absent, leaving the interior exposed to the whims of nature. This visual composition evokes an almost eerie ambiance, compelling viewers to reflect on the delicate nature of human creations and the relentless march of decay. The conspicuous void created by the missing protective barrier generates an atmosphere that prompts contemplation on the vulnerability of cultural spaces and the transient essence of societal accomplishments. As the vacant expanse becomes subject to the elements, wind, rainfall and the penetrating rays of sunlight, it becomes a powerful symbol of the gradual erosion of cultural heritage.

D i s c u s s i o n

The investigation into how artists integrate abandoned buildings within their artistic practice significantly enhances our comprehension of the way we perceive ruins and the inherent value they possess. The value lies in our ability to connect with them and allow them to trigger our imagination. Ruins provide theoretical space for the development of creative thinking for artists, writers, architects, and explorers. In a 2013 article for *Scientific American*, scientist Matthew Lieberman (Lieberman, 2013) states that ‘the things that cause us to feel pain are things that are evolutionarily recognised as threats to our survival and the existence of social pain is a sign that evolution has treated social connection like a necessity’. This need for connection creates a tendency for us to superimpose our own mortality onto the ruins, manifesting in feelings of empathy and melancholia towards the decaying structure. Ruins connect us in collective mourning as symbols of time passed, the inevitable ageing process, fragility, the impermanence of human life, human creations, and the power of nature. They represent a connection to the past and can give us a glimpse into how people lived, how society was structured and how people may have interacted with their environment. They can also be used to focus attention on social issues and emphasise the importance of climate action. This is particularly evident in the work of Hocking where we see the manmade objects survive and pollute long after the existence of humanity on Zug Island.

There is also value in their role in place-making, they are landmarks of our history, both physically and psychologically, creating community connections. This point reinforces DeSilvey and Edensor’s (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013) argument that ruins have merit to just be ruins. In the field of architecture, an essential part of the design process is creating or reinforcing a link with the past when repurposing these abandoned buildings; this is often the fundamental part of good design ethos. Rather than attempting to erase or ignore the past, it should be embraced and celebrated. To do this sensitively, it is essential to understand why we connect with abandoned and derelict buildings. This understanding enables us to create spaces that enhance the user experience.

To convey the research findings, a photographic exhibition (Image 22), accompanied by an installation of decaying furniture and artefacts offers a captivating and thought-provoking exploration of ruins. The curated photographs within the exhibition capture the essence of ruins with particular

attention to detail and artistic vision. Through careful composition, lighting, and perspective, the photographs evoke a sense of melancholy, inviting viewers to contemplate the passage of time, impermanence, and the transformative power of decay. The visual narratives conveyed offer a rich tapestry of emotions and memories, that prompt reflection on the profound connections we form with these abandoned spaces. Some images, Image 19 for example, were naturally visually interesting and evocative in terms of their composition and textural qualities and needed no human intervention. In other images, such as Image 9, we observe the placement of delicately arranged balloons on the staircase of the ruin. The balloons, filled with air, serve as a visual representation of breath and life. Their delicate nature contrasts starkly with the surrounding ruin and decay, creating a poignant reminder of the fleeting nature of human existence and our fragility. The deliberate exclusion of colour from the images was undertaken to purposefully shift focus towards the contextual aspects, while simultaneously employing the retention of certain items in colour to accentuate their significance. This artistic decision facilitates a targeted emphasis on specific elements within the monochromatic composition. In Image 7, McDonalds, a globally recognisable brand, sits in a juxtaposition in the derelict building, creating a sense of irony and contrasts, highlighting the disparity between the world of consumerism and the world of decay. The bright colours of the packaging appear unnatural and out of place in the image. This can be interpreted as a commentary on the superficiality of our culture and the need for deeper connections to the world around us.



Image 24. Part of Ruin Nation Photographic Exhibition, ATU, County Sligo (K.K. 2023)



Image 25. Part of Ruin Nation Photographic Exhibition, ATU, County Sligo (K.K. 2023)

Accompanying the photographic works, there is an installation of decaying furniture and artefacts (Image 25) which adds an immersive dimension to the exhibition. These physical remnants, weathered and worn by time, serve as tangible symbols of the past and evoke a tactile and sensory experience for visitors. The selection of these artefacts not only enhances the authenticity of the exhibition but also provides a tangible connection to the history and lives that once inhabited these spaces. Each item tells its own story, contributing to the overall narrative of decay, loss, connection and time. This exhibition fosters a deeper appreciation for the inherent beauty, melancholic fascination, and cultural significance of ruins, stimulating dialogue and introspection on the transient nature of human existence and the power of decay. The exhibition encourages viewers to consider the value of these abandoned spaces as valuable cultural assets and the importance of preserving and appreciating their historical and aesthetic significance.



Image 26. Ruin Nation Furniture Installation, ATU, County Sligo (K.K. 2023)



Image 27. Ruin Nation Furniture Installation, ATU, County Sligo (K.K. 2023)



Image 28. Ruin Nation Furniture Installation, ATU, County Sligo (K.K. 2023)

Paint peelings extracted from a derelict cottage, meticulously preserved within a glass display cloche.



Image 29. Ruin Nation Furniture Installation, ATU, County Sligo (K.K. 2023)

Discarded glasses and shoes found in the farmhouse.

C o n c l u s i o n

The research project has provided a comprehensive investigation into the melancholic connection to ruins and the value they hold, utilising photography as an art-based research method. By examining the emotional, cultural, and artistic dimensions associated with ruins, we have gained a deeper understanding of their significance and impact on individuals and societies.

Throughout the research, photography served as a powerful tool for capturing the essence of ruins and conveying their melancholic attraction. The photographs revealed the interplay of light and shadows, textures, and decay, all of which contributed to the evocative nature of the imagery. The careful composition and framing communicate a sense of nostalgia, transience, and poetic beauty often associated with ruins and decay. The exploration of the melancholic connection to ruins unearthed a range of emotions and psychological responses evoked by these decaying architectural remnants. The exhibition conveyed a sense of longing, contemplation, and introspection, inviting viewers to reflect on the passage of time, the ephemeral nature of existence, and the impermanence of human creations. The research highlighted the universal human tendency to project personal narratives onto ruins, finding solace, and a sense of connection in their dilapidated state. Furthermore, the study of the cultural and societal value of ruins provided insights into their significance within contemporary contexts. The photographs showcased how ruins act as potent symbols of history, cultural heritage, and collective memory. They embody layers of stories and narratives, representing a tangible link to the past and a source of inspiration for artistic expression. The research underscored the importance of preserving and appreciating ruins as valuable cultural assets that contribute to a sense of place, identity, and continuity.

In conclusion, this research project has demonstrated the intrinsic link between the melancholic connection to ruins and the value they hold within society. The utilisation of photography as an art-based research method has provided a unique and insightful perspective into the emotional, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of ruins. The photographs have evoked profound emotions, stimulated contemplation, and conveyed the enduring appeal of these abandoned spaces. The visual language employed in the images transcended mere documentation, offering a profound aesthetic and emotional engagement with the subject matter. Moving forward, further research can continue to explore the various dimensions of the melancholic connection to

ruins and their value, delving deeper into the cultural, historical, and social aspects. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches that combine photography with other art forms or research methods could yield even richer and more nuanced understandings of this complex topic.

Ultimately, this research project contributes to the broader understanding of ruins as cultural artefacts, highlighting their importance in shaping individual and collective identities, fostering a connection to the past, and stimulating artistic exploration. It is through continued exploration and appreciation of ruins that we can continue to uncover the profound beauty and value they possess.

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Images

Images 1 & 2

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Image 3.

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Image 4.

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Image 5

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Image 6

Flooded McDonald's (no date) *SUPERFLEX*. Available at: https://superflex.net/works/flooded_mcdonalds (Accessed: April 9, 2023).

Images 7 - 13
The Farmhouse (2023) Authors Own
Images 14 - 20
The Cottage (2023) Authors Own

Images 21 - 23
The Savoy Cinema (2023) Authors Own

Image 24 - 29
Exhibition (2023) Authors' Own

Image 30
Sketch of exhibition Design (2023) Authors' Own

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A p p e n d i c e s



Figure 30. Sketch of original exhibition design (Authors Own, 2023)

The original exhibition that was planned was to communicate the findings by viewing the imagery as part of an immersive experience. The aim was to exclude the distractions of external stimuli, so the user focuses only on the imagery and experiences the notion of entering another space in time, just as they would if they physically visited the ruins. Due to the limitations of the research exhibit the practical elements had to be lightweight and easily moveable. Suspended foamboard isolation booths were constructed with photography illuminated on one side. The remaining photographs are displayed alongside found objects from the ruins. Regrettably, this original plan had to be abandoned due to the unsuitability of the exhibition venue. The building lacked the necessary infrastructure and conditions to support this installation approach. Therefore, alternative methods of presenting the research findings had to be devised, ensuring that the essence and impact of the imagery and objects were still effectively conveyed to the audience.

Despite the need for adaptation, the core objective remained to communicate the research findings and evoke an immersive experience for viewers. While the original plan had to be modified, the subsequent presentation of the imagery and artefacts maintained the intention of creating a compelling and engaging

exhibition. The chosen approach, considering the limitations of the venue, aimed to showcase the photographs and found objects in a manner that preserved their inherent significance and allowed viewers to connect with the melancholic essence of the ruins.

Exhibition Poster

Welcome to "Ruin Nation"

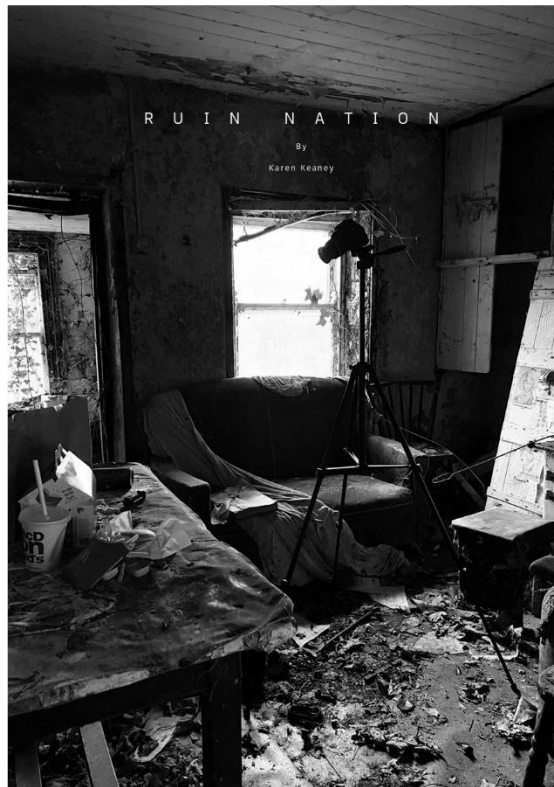
In this photographic exhibition, we delve into the poignant realm of ruination, exploring the profound human connection to the remnants of the built environment that have fallen into decay over the past century. Beyond the physical decay, it is the human connection to these ruins that resonates the most. These forsaken places, once teeming with life and purpose, now stand as silent witnesses to the passage of time, beckoning us to ponder the fleeting nature of existence and the ephemeral quality of human achievements. In these ruins, we glimpse echoes of our own mortality and the impermanence of the world around us.

As you journey through this exhibition, be prepared to be transported to a realm where past and present converge, where beauty emerges from desolation, and where the melancholic human connection to ruins comes alive. Join us in contemplating the evocative power of ruination, and let these photographs serve as a testament to the enduring allure of decayed architecture in our collective memory.

Karen Keaney

IAD

Exhibition Booklet



Welcome to "Ruin Nation"

In this photographic exhibition, we delve into the poignant realm of ruination, exploring the profound human connection to the remnants of the built environment that have fallen into decay over the past century.





Beyond the physical decay, it is the human connection to these ruins that resonates the most. These forsaken places, once teeming with life and purpose, now stand as silent witnesses to the passage of time, beckoning us to ponder the fleeting nature of existence and the ephemeral quality of human achievements. In these ruins, we glimpse echoes of our own mortality and the impermanence of the world around us.





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