

Images Out of Time: Berlin's Museum Island



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Maymester 2025: May 19-June 13

M, W, F: 9:30-12:30 online via Zoom

Tuesday: Independent Museum Visits

Berlin: June 1-June 8 schedule different; approx.. 8 hours of organized time daily

Independent European Research: June 9-13.

Course Description:

This graduate seminar is the capstone of the VSRI's NEH funded "Images Out of Time" seminar, which considers how images travel through time, dropping in and out of linear histories and reshaping perception, institutions, and social practices along the way. We will study images and objects that are at odds with the moment of their appearance, whether they outlived their initial function or lost contact with their original cultural contexts. Monuments to unjust pasts, icons manifesting fallen gods, ancient ruins in modern structures, replicas and forgeries, old images restored by new technologies: these images force a paradox into view.

Two weeks of intensive reading and seminars in LA will be followed by an eight day trip to Berlin, where this problematic will be applied to the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as "Museum Island" - a remarkable ensemble of buildings that encompasses five museums built in the 19th century, recently renovated to mark the reunification of Germany.

Museums are ideal sites in which to consider the enduring power of the continuous histories of images. They also remain stubborn signs of vanished worlds, out of step with the present. Debates about repatriating artifacts, even dismantling museums, and preserving cultural heritage destroyed by war or exploitation will be foregrounded as we spend the week not only examining the collections but their history and installation.

Lectures, readings and discussion intersect art history, religious studies, history, anthropology, literature, and film, and cuts across divisions separating premodern and modern, as well as European, Atlantic, and Pacific spheres.

Students who wish to register for this seminar must be enrolled in the VSGC and will be required to apply for VSRI research support in Spring 2024. Contact Jennifer Miller at jennifmm@usc.edu or vsri@usc.edu. VISS 599 is a required course for the VSGC. Students may take VISS 599 twice for credit.

