

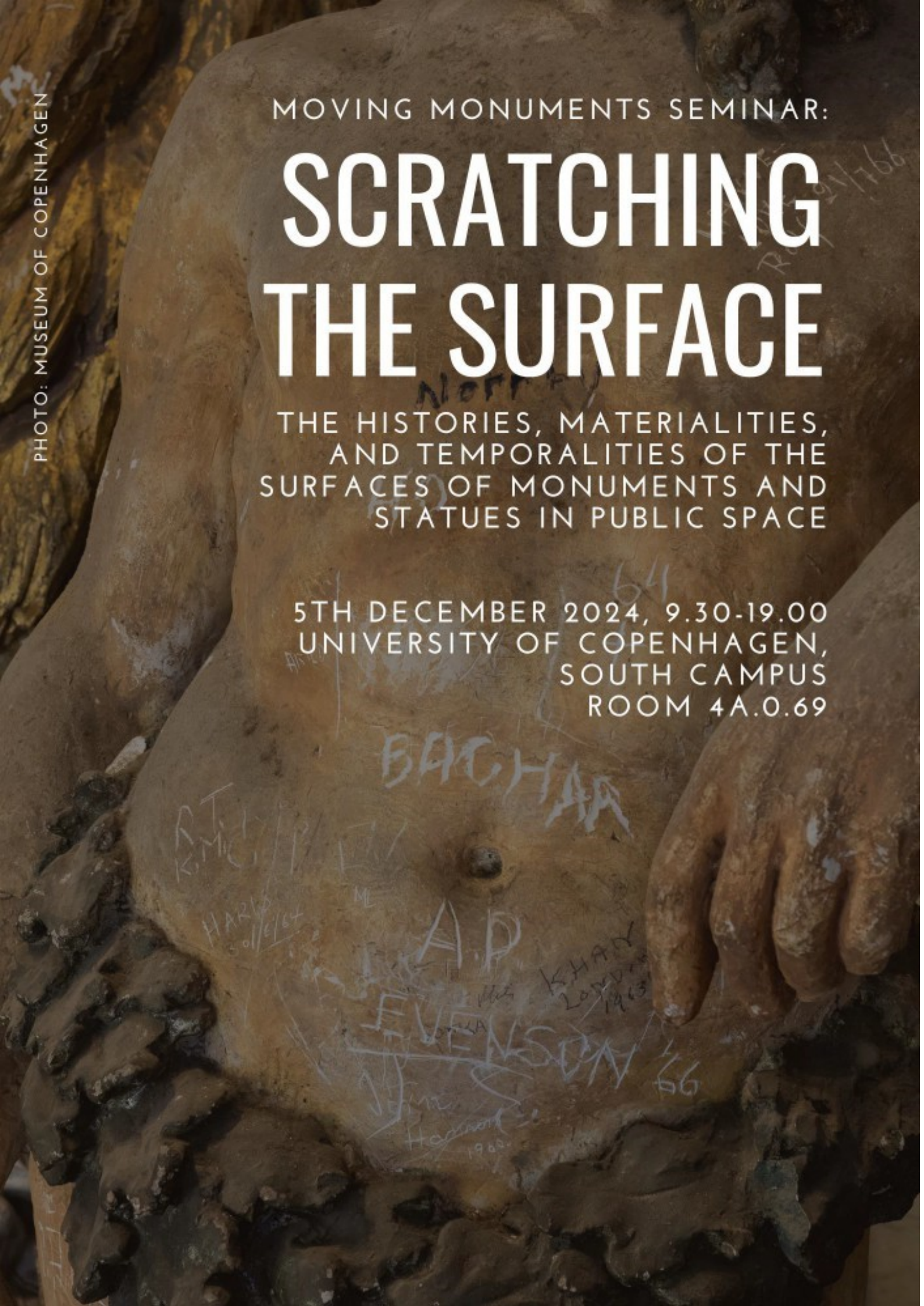
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MOVING MONUMENTS SEMINAR:

# SCRATCHING THE SURFACE

THE HISTORIES, MATERIALITIES,  
AND TEMPORALITIES OF THE  
SURFACES OF MONUMENTS AND  
STATUES IN PUBLIC SPACE

5TH DECEMBER 2024, 9.30-19.00  
UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN,  
SOUTH CAMPUS  
ROOM 4A.0.69



In recent years, there has been a surge in attention towards interventions targeting monuments and public statues. Images depicting statues modified with paint or graffiti, as well as of the subsequent cleaning processes, where city officials remove the paint, have circulated globally following the Black Lives Matter demonstrations of 2020. This has raised awareness towards the role of the monument in the ongoing negotiations of the materialization of commemorative expressions in public spaces. As paint, graffiti, and other interactions with public statues are often erased, traces from how people intervene with statues in public space, and what messages these interventions may carry from demonstrations to “every day” use, are rarely preserved.

Whether viewed as acts of protest, re-inscription, re-materialization, or other forms of engagement, these actions, alongside ongoing conservation efforts, emphasizes an important, but often-overlooked aspect of public monuments: their surfaces. As scholarly research and public debates adapts a traditional focus on the aesthetics of public statuary as adhering to ideas about form and materiality, their surfaces remain unexplored. But as art historian Lise Skytte Jakobsen points to in *Metaskulptur* (2019), the surface is an agile layer that can be altered, removed, or added to, profoundly influencing our perception of the sculpture.

While monuments pose as symbols of durability and permanence in discussions of public history and memory, the maintenance work needed to secure that they appear stable and lasting often goes unnoticed. Despite efforts to maintain their static presence, all materials inevitably decay. There remains, in short, a pressing need to examine the histories, ideologies, and temporalities at play on and in the surface of monuments, and its effects on their aesthetic, political and commemorative function.

With this seminar, we aim to delve into the dynamic nature of monument surfaces and their impact on public perception. We wish to bring people together for joint discussions and considerations on how enriching the vocabulary and terminology surrounding interventions and preservation efforts can enhance both public and academic discourse. By exploring the intersections of materiality, temporality, and memory, we aim to deepen our understanding of how monuments' images, meanings, and physical presence are negotiated, both historically and in contemporary contexts.

The seminar is arranged within the framework of the research project “[Moving Monuments: The Material Life of Sculpture from the Danish Colonial Era](#)” funded by the Novo Nordisk Foundation and housed by the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, UCPH.

Moving Monuments is organized by Mathias Danbolt and Amalie Skovmøller at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies.

For questions, please contact Ida Hornung Havgaard at [iho@hum.ku.dk](mailto:iho@hum.ku.dk)



## Seminar program

09:30-10:00: Arrival and coffee

10:00 – 11:10: Session 1 moderated by Ida Hornung Havgaard

Introduction by Mathias Danbolt, Amalie Skovmøller, and Ida Hornung Havgaard

Speaker #1 Lise Skytte Jakobsen, School of Communication and Culture – Art History, Aarhus University: *Life on the Surface*

11:10 – 11:30: Break

11:30 – 12:50: Session 2 moderated by Amalie Skovmøller

Speaker #2 Louise Nicole Cone, Contemporary Art & Sculpture Conservator, SMK: *Conserving the changing materiality of surfaces*

Speaker #3 Emma Bryning, Department of Archaeology, University of York: *Mark-making through history: vandalism or tradition?*

12:50 – 13:50: Lunch

13:50 – 15:10: Session 3 moderated by Mathias Danbolt

Speaker #4 Tim Cole, Department of History (Historical Studies), University of Bristol: *From red to blue, 'F—k off slave trader' to 'PRICK', and cleaning to conservation: The Colston Statue, graffiti and the museum, 1998-2024*

Speaker #5 Jim Brogden, School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds: *Performative protest: the permanence and ephemerality of re-inscribed monuments.*

15:10 – 15:40: Coffee break

15:40 – 17:00: Session 4 moderated by Amalie Skovmøller

Speaker #6 Kim Gurney, Independent researcher, writer and visual artist, Cape Town: *Zombie monuments: The second lives of a voided plinth and a respawning nose*

Speaker #7 Terne Thorsen, Department of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen: *On the Surface: Climate Activists' Reversible Iconoclasm*

17:00 – 17:15: Break

17:15 – 18:00: Session 5 – Final discussion moderated by Elizabeth Marlowe, Department of Art, Colgate University

18:00 – 19:00: Reception w. bubbles

## Abstracts & bios

Lise Skytte Jakobsen

“Life on the surface”

In my book *Metaskulptur*, I explore the various ways in which sculptures function as images. This includes a discussion of how surfaces have been a battleground both regarding questions of mediality (the ways sculpture as medium is being characterized and defined) and art historical understandings of sculpture.

In this paper, I will highlight some of these perspectives, with a particular focus on polychromy, and discuss how we might develop a more nuanced language—and perhaps even a method—for recognizing and understanding sculptural imaginaries, and in turn, 'life on the surface.'

**Bio:**

Lise Skytte Jakobsen, PhD, Associate Professor of art history and museology, head of Center for museology, School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University, Denmark. Her publications focuses on sculpture analysis and museology: <https://pure.au.dk/portal/en/persons/kunlsj@cc.au.dk>

Louise Nicole Cone

“Conserving the changing materiality of surfaces”

Over time, objects can become disconnected from their original context, with little or no information available about their provenance or relative historical importance. Outdoor monumental sculpture, both older and newer, are especially prone to degradation by dissociation as well as by the physical changes incurred by exposure to the public and to the elements. The aim of conservation is no longer only about preserving the authentic, physical object, or about monitoring the life expectancy of an artwork, but also managing the continuity of meaning. Meaning is often reliant upon the agency of the materials used, as well as understanding the significance of the artwork either as an historical artifact or as a relevant contemporary object with a voice, an intention, and a place in contemporary cultural history. The condition of an artwork affects the way we view it and factors such as climate, environment, vandalism, physical and chemical degradation as well as natural aging can all play a part in surface erosion and color change, especially in outdoor sculpture. The surface, as well as the structural soundness of a work are thus naturally important factors to consider when interpreting meaning. The question is what or who determines how far we are willing to go in the name of preservation? Moreover, is it possible to conserve the materiality of the surface without erasing its historicity?

**Bio:**

Louise Cone is presently the conservator in charge of the contemporary art and sculpture collection at Statens Museum for Kunst (SMK) (since 2005), which entails working across many different art historical periods to care for a broad spectrum of materials, dating from the earliest works in the collection to today. Louise has worked with the preservation of outdoor sculpture, both old and new, as well as on numerous research projects, with an emphasis on understanding the properties and behaviours of modern materials, as well as the special preservation concerns of ephemeral, performative and media-based artworks.

Emma Bryning

## “Mark-making through history: vandalism or tradition?”

The term ‘graffiti’ is often understood through its more modern definition which focuses on this form of mark-making as evidence of antisocial or criminal behaviour. However, in Britain it was only in the 19th-century that the act of graffiti began to be viewed under this lens. Interestingly, it was also during this period that it became increasingly common for individuals and groups to leave marks when interacting with some cultural and historic sites. Concerns over the destruction or decay of monuments led to the introduction of the Ancient Monuments Protection Act in Britain in 1882 to repair and protect such sites ‘from decay or injury’. Whilst legislation began to be introduced to protect heritage assets, at some sites the practice of leaving graffiti has continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This paper will draw on graffiti recorded from over forty sites within England’s National Heritage Collection, managed by English Heritage, to present a brief insight into a history of graffiti creation on heritage assets in England and the implications that such information can provide for the management of these and similar sites. Due to the protected status of these sites, contemporary marks made on protected heritage assets are illegal in nature as they constitute a heritage crime. However, the examination of graffiti across time can also provide an alternative history for heritage sites and evidence of traditional practice that continues, in some places, to the present day. This paper aims to demonstrate how researching the tangible marks left on the surface of such sites can lead to the incorporation of diverse stories that would otherwise remain hidden or unknown, and potentially challenge the strict dichotomy between vandalism and preservation within heritage management.

### **Bio:**

Emma is a PhD student at the University of York working on a research project with English Heritage which seeks to understand why historic graffiti matters and to whom, and whether understanding graffiti creation today can help us to better understand historic mark making in the past. She has previously worked as a Learning & Community Officer and Visitor Experience Manager at the Monastery Manchester, alongside a variety of other museum and heritage positions. She has also undertaken placements with English Heritage and Historic England during her PhD studies, including into properties research, as a Curatorial Assistant and as a Wellbeing and Heritage Advisor.

Tim Cole

## “From red to blue, ‘F—k off slave trader’ to ‘PRICK’, and cleaning to conservation: The Colston Statue, graffiti and the museum, 1998-2024”

In January 1998, ‘F—k off slave trader’ was daubed in red paint on the plinth of the statue to Edward Colston (1636-1721) that had stood in the centre of Bristol since 1895. The graffiti appeared the morning after a community consultation event organised in the run-up to the creation of a temporary exhibition - ‘A Respectable Trade? Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery’ – in the City Museum and Art Gallery. The graffiti was swiftly removed by city council contractors, but its legacy remained. In this paper I trace the history of graffiti on both the plinth and bronze, figurative statue, from ‘F—k off slave trader’ spraypainted in red in January 1998 to ‘PRICK’ spraypainted in blue in June 2020. As well as exploring the history of graffiti interventions as acts of writing new narratives on to this statue, I am particularly interested in shifting responses to these incidents both within the media and by the city

council. Rather than erasing the graffiti applied to the statue after its toppling during Black Lives Matter protests, staff in the city museum sought to carefully conserve this latest layer. Drawing on both press commentary as well as the voices of local residents from a consultation undertaken in 2021 that garnered close to 14,000 responses, I uncover both divided responses to the conservation of graffiti, as well as a shared understanding that graffiti radically rewrites the history that monuments offer.

**Bio:**

Tim Cole is Professor of Social History at the University of Bristol. He is the author of five books and co-editor of four books on the history, geography and memory of the Holocaust and environmental and social history of contemporary Europe. In 2020, he was invited by the Mayor of Bristol to chair the History Commission set up in the wake of the toppling of the Colston Statue. Tim is currently working with Tanja Schult (Stockholm) on a research project on the role of monuments in contemporary democracies as well as on a number of digital humanities projects in Holocaust studies.

Dr Jim Brogden FRSA

“Performative protest: the permanence and ephemerality of re-inscribed monuments”

This paper applies a social semiotic methodology to explore the meanings attached to the re-inscriptions of public monuments during protests in England and America between 2014 - 2024. Attention is given to several case-studies which provided a locus for public outrage, resentment, and revisionism; these included the vandalised statue of Ghandi, in Leicester (2014), the vernacular George Floyd Memorial in Minneapolis (2020), adding momentum to the Black Lives Matter protests (2020), the defacing of Winston Churchill’s statue in London (2020), the racist slurs sprayed on Queen Victoria’s statue in Leeds (2020), performative re-inscriptions resonating in the pro-Palestinian protests at the Cenotaph, in London (2023). One reflects on the ephemerality of re-inscriptions and how they might receive a social semiotic “second life”, through (re)presentations uploaded to so-called “legacy” mainstream and social media, and in some cases, often disseminated privately, and archived on the internet – a process much harder to erase than the material public sphere. Interestingly, although institutions of power are effective in removing re-inscriptions from monuments, the idiosyncratic ‘grassroots’ tribute to George Floyd in Minneapolis has now achieved a material permanence as a figurative bronze statue outside New Jersey’s City Hall (2021). What are the lasting implications and consequences of re-inscriptions on monuments as protest? Are monuments ‘soft targets’ enabling a form of recreational protest? And how might we consider the feelings and values of those citizens who do not subscribe to such inscriptions within the democratic system? Should we reconceptualise the existing contested monuments, to rehabilitate them for future generations, or allow them to remain to shame us?

**Bio:**

Jim Brogden is Associate Professor in Critical Practice and Creative Practice, and Director of Practice Research in the School of Media and Communication at the University of Leeds. He is the author of *Photography and the Non-Place: The Cultural Erasure of the City* (Palgrave, 2019), and co-author with Stephen Coleman of *Capturing the Mood of Democracy: The British General Election 2019* (Palgrave, 2020). He is a member of the International Visual Sociology Association, a Fellow of the Royal Society

of Arts, United Kingdom, and visiting professor at the American Academy of Art College, Chicago, and Antwerp (ViDi) University, Belgium.

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5059-6197>

Kim Gurney

“Zombie monuments: The second lives of a voided plinth and a respawning nose”

This talk explores the performative afterlives of two toppled memorials to the same colonial figure, in Cape Town (South Africa), and their ongoing meaningfulness as vectors of resistance and re-imagining of the public sphere. Close attention is paid to the shapeshifting nature of their ephemeral second lives, which often defy the commemorative logics that birthed them. I use a research methodology of ‘follow the thing’ to surface various entanglements. The first trajectory comprises repeat visits to a boarded-up plinth at a university campus whose ongoing metamorphoses I have been documenting for the past decade. Since 2015, it has become a public platform for largely unsanctioned interventions. The voided plinth formerly hosted a statue of Cecil John Rhodes, whose legacy is contested. Its removal by university authorities, to an undisclosed location, was triggered by a performative protest from a student regarding ongoing inequities, which sparked a nationwide political movement. The second trajectory follows a bronze nose, grinded off the same year from a nearby bust of Rhodes, and later its decapitated head. Today, the bust is back in situ - with a remodelled nose, numerous scars, and fitted with a GPS tracker. Through contrasting strategies of disappearance on the one hand and restoration on the other, both sites have become memorials to something different - the unfinished business of the past. In these second lives, they propose what common space could be: contested, negotiated and performed anew.

**Bio:**

Kim Gurney, PhD, is an academic researcher, writer and visual artist. Her interdisciplinary work specialises in public space and the urban commons, paying particular attention to the working principles of independent art spaces and DIY institution-building. She is the author of four books linking contemporary art to city futures, most recently, *Flipside: The Inadvertent Archive* (2024, iwalewabooks). Kim lives in Cape Town, South Africa. [www.linktr.ee/kimjg](http://www.linktr.ee/kimjg)

Terne Thorsen

“On the Surface: Climate Activists’ Reversible Iconoclasm”

In 2022, a new type of iconoclastic protests emerged, when climate activists protesting planetary injustices hurled tomato soup and oily liquids at world famous paintings, demanding (and getting) the attention of the world.

The protests have since continued, and activists have targeted a wide range of objects, places and spaces of cultural significance – most notably (in) museums and galleries, but statues, fountains and facades have also fallen victim of the demonstrations. While the actions have created headlines around the world, none of the targeted objects have been damaged, despite the over 60

demonstrations that have taken place since 2022. Instead, the interventions only touch the surface of the targeted objects – the activists have only chosen paintings, which are protected by glass, and when sites like the Stonehenge are targeted, it is done with orange corn flour that will “wash away with the rain” – as the activists have realised that they do not have to destroy anything to make the news. The thought (and image) of a destroyed Van Gogh is more than enough.

Departing from Gamboni’s (1997) argument that the actions of iconoclasts should always be considered a means of communication, the paper examines the role that the surfaces play in the activists’ iconoclasm. How intentional is the choice of reversible modes of iconoclasm and does it influence the choice of targets? How does the reversibility of the modes affect the actions and their effect?

**Bio:**

Terne Thorsen is a postdoc and is currently researching unauthorized interactions with public statues and monuments in Copenhagen on a Mads Øvlisen Postdoc Fellowship funded by the Novo Nordisk Foundation. She holds a PhD in Modern Culture from the Institute of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Copenhagen. In her dissertation *Breaking and Creating: The Contemporary Iconoclasm of the Islamic State* (2023), she researched the Islamic State’s destruction of cultural heritage and their visual propaganda depicting the acts of destruction, focusing on the group’s paradoxical relationship between the destruction and production of images.

Her research is fuelled by a broader curiosity on the connection between on the role and function of images and their treatment, and she is particularly engaged in questions concerning contemporary expressions of iconoclasm and their relations to images, art, and digital media.

## Elizabeth Marlowe

**Bio:**

Elizabeth Marlowe is the Chair of the Department of Art and the Director of the Program in Museum Studies at Colgate University, a private, liberal arts college in central New York. She did her graduate work in Classics and Art History at Cambridge University and Columbia University. Over the years, her research has shifted from traditional studies of Roman imperial art and politics toward critical analysis of how and why Roman art is commodified, displayed, and discussed in the modern world. She has also developed broad interests in how museums present controversial subjects such as their own institutional histories, colonialism, violence, forgery, repatriation requests, and epistemological uncertainty to their audiences.





## Søndre Campus / South Campus

Fakulteter og institutter  
/ Faculties and departments

**Det Teologiske Fakultet/Faculty of Theology**  
Bygning/building 6.7. & 8

**Det Juridiske Fakultet/Faculty of Law**  
Bygning/building 6.7. & 8

**Det Humanistiske Fakultet/Faculty of Humanities**

**Bygning/building 10**  
Institut for Tværkulturelle og Regionale Studier  
/ Department of Cross-cultural and Regional Studies

**Bygning/building 12**  
Saxo-Institutet  
/ Saxo Institute

**Bygning/building 16**  
Institut for Kommunikation  
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**Bygning/building 21**  
Institut for Kunst- og Kulturvidenskab  
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**Bygning/building 22**  
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/ Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics

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/ Department of English, Germanic and Romance Studies

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Bygning/building 13, 14 & 27

### Find your way:

The seminar is held at the South Campus at University of Copenhagen in room 4A.0.69 marked with an x on the campus map. Coffee breaks are held outside of the auditorium.

The closest canteen and coffee shop are encircled on the map.

The south campus may be reached via M2 metro line stop "Islands Brygge" marked with an M on the map.

