



RUINS OF THE PRESENT THROUGH CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

*Natalia Gurieva, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Art,
University of Guanajuato, Mexico*

*Cecilia Alondra Perez Aguilera, Digital Art student,
University of Guadalajara, Mexico*

The past, like the future, is not a time before and after in relation to the present, but simply projections of the present, carried out in accordance with special rules. When it is possible to extend the concept of *ruins* to objects of the modern era, the distance between the past and the present is destroyed, the very structure of time crumbles. This indicates a change in the basic temporal structure's characteristic of modern society and, at the same time, their exposure. All of this allows us to reformulate the question of *modern ruins* as a question of *the ruins of modernity*. This shift in perspective invites reflection on the decay, fragmentation, and disintegration inherent in modern society and culture. Furthermore, the concept of *human ruins* suggests a parallel between physical decay and the existential or psychological deterioration experienced by individuals in contemporary times.

Permanence has always been sought for everything that is created, architectural structures have been one of the great examples of this constant effort to last over time, but by considering other aspects or objects that make up us as a society, we can achieve to observe a difficulty in order to explain its history or importance. Overall, the passage raises profound questions about the nature of time, history, and human existence, challenging us to reconsider our assumptions and interpretations of these fundamental concepts.

This project will examine the problem of a change in the basic temporal structures of modern society associated with changes in its social and power architecture through photography. Projects of contemporary photographers will be analyzed to establish interest in the *modern ruins*, that is part of a more general trend towards the *ruinization of modernity*.

When exploring the various projects of the contemporary artists (Blackmore, L., 2017), a constant inclination towards the nostalgic stands out, evoking memories and stages of life. However, ruins are not limited to the destruction of past thoughts or the memory of mistakes. Historical contextualization offers a new perspective and deepens the understanding of change. Photographs allow us to appreciate change from contemporary perspectives, but sometimes they can stray into pessimistic visions that seek to frame a thought. This research aspires to treat these feelings and objects as a flashing light, persevering in its attempt to last.

Continuing to explore the power of photography to reflect *contemporary ruins* and their emotional connections, it is important to consider how each of the artists' perspectives manifest in the compositions we explore. These compositions allow us to delve into the objects or emotions that the artists' memory has decided to remember. By taking this into account, it can be understood that human beings take a



mental photograph of what changed and transformed them, since all these aspects that are tried to be shown in the photographs come from that place where the connection with others is unconsciously understood.

This is an important point to address: can ruins be shared? On many occasions, those thoughts or experiences are part of other people in your close circle; In some ways, it is an internal web of who they are and why their thoughts may fit. The ruins of memory would also be the explanation for all this that unites them beyond what they can explain. That is why, when paying attention to the photos, you will find details that make up a general context.

The details act as connecting threads, as in each image there seems to be an attempt to represent a style with some familiarity. The feeling of comfort with the space one inhabits in this world may be related to the way one perceives the ruins of the "past" that remain. This sense of familiarity and comfort can be another point of union, since by exploring various perspectives, these experiences or thoughts that seem recurring can be repeatedly recognized. So, it is worth asking: what would the ruins be if there were no one to discover them at some point? Through this question, a new perspective can be explored: the ruins do not only represent oblivion, but an enigmatic space, difficult to explain. They are like an intermediate state between memory, presence and transformation.

Finally, photographic portraits of our serie (see figure 1) not only serve as historical witnesses or sources of artistic inspiration, but also add a deeper dimension to the aspects previously explored. Beyond being mere visual representations of the human, these portraits capture the very essence of human emotions, relationships, and experiences. Each image not only shows a human face, but also what defines it: the scars of the past and new interpretations of the same features. Thus, the human face becomes a symbol of continuity and change, where past and future coexist in what could appear, at first glance, to be a mere portrait. This duality between permanence and transformation is reflected in the way in which it seeks to resort to this reinterpretation of the emotions experienced, adding details that exaggerate them and show them as new flashes of experience.

As mentioned, architectural ruins are vestiges of the past that influence the present. One's own personal and emotional experiences can be considered ruins of the internal history of each individual. Just as physical structures are explored for clues about the past, these photographs can be taken as an exploration of internal experiences. Each artist shows that experience that left a mark, a mark that lasts in memory and that shapes the perception of the world and of oneself.



Figure 1 – Selected portraits of the Serie (own elaboration)

References

1. Blackmore, L. (2017). Ruinas modernas y arte contemporáneo: el caso de El Helicoide de la Roca Tarpeya. *Cuadernos de Literatura* 21(42), 255-277. <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.cl21-42.rmac>.
2. Thamrongrattanarit, N. (Dirección). (2019). Happy old year [Película].