Books

Why We’re All So Captivated by Ruins

Miles Orvell ’64CC explores how the spectacle of destruction shapes the way we process time and change.

Spring/Summer 2021

In his fascinating new book *Empire of Ruins: American Culture, Photography, and the Spectacle of Destruction*, Miles Orvell ’64CC explores how photography has shaped the meaning of ruins in American culture. Orvell, a professor of English and American studies at Temple University, argues that images of destroyed buildings and landscapes balance horror and beauty, transforming disaster and decay into a spectacle that compels our moral attention.



John Ganis, used with permission

A 2013 photograph by John Ganis shows the remains of beach houses in Mantoloking, New Jersey, after Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc on the mid-Atlantic coast.



Richard Misrach, courtesy of Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

Richard Misrach’s 1989 image shows rusted machines and shrapnel at the former site of Utah’s Wendover Air Force Base, which was used during World War II to train pilots to deliver the atomic bomb.

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