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**Lost and Found: Archaeological Fragments and Contemporary Art**

From the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century on, with Neoclassicism and the beginning of modern art history, classical art started to be seen as part of an irretrievable past and at the same time as a utopian model for the art of the present and the future. A significant outcome of such a paradoxical vision of Antiquity at the dawn of modernity is the increasingly important role assumed by classical fragments in the works of artists from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such fragments (in the art of Füssli, Rodin, de Chirico and Brâncuși, for instance) on the one hand evoke the prestige of a past considered irremediably lost, on the other hand they stand as a sign for memory and hint at the relationship with a living, ever changing and continuously renegotiated tradition. In the 1960s and 1970s, after art reached a post-medium condition, one may wonder what could be the meaning of the many classical fragments to be found, for example, in Giulio Paolini's or Jannis Kounellis' works; or of the use of the archaeological paradigm (or parodies) in Robert Smithson's works. Fragments of the classical past or archaeological evocations in advanced art of those years are not to be considered empty 'quotations' from an undifferentiated past, but they seem instead to suggest a conception of history based on a non-linear, dynamic sense of memory and time that, in this paper, will be connected with Walter Benjamin's theses *On the Concept of History*, for example, or with George Kubler's book *The Shape of Time*. The debris of the past in the art of the 1960s and 1970s, therefore, is not meant to produce a kind of renovated *rovinismo*, rather it poses questions as to how a relationship with tradition could still be maintained by art after Modernism.