

# ALISON RUTTAN

## ARTWORK

*Unmaking of Places and Histories* features new and recent architectural ceramic sculptures by Chicago-based artist Alison Ruttan. She draws on the histories of art, architecture, and warfare to address the aftermath of conflicts in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, as a way of, in her words, “bearing witness from here.” One gallery is dedicated to the artist’s *Dark City*, a tabletop row of nine white ceramic buildings referencing the widespread destruction in Syria. The row of forms begins with a solid building, seemingly intact, but the other eight progressively crumble and flatten. Ruttan cites the influence of artists Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt in terms of remaking similar geometric forms, but in her work, various states of collapse and devastation are evident within the Modern grid. The artist sees the small scale of her works as a “purposely intimate anti-war monument.”

The exhibition also premieres several new works for which Ruttan embedded her ceramic buildings and debris within found furniture. The blue-glazed ruins of a building reach upward from a narrow wooden dresser; a pile of pale gray rubble overflows the open drawer of a white nightstand; the remains of a black building freeze in a state of collapse into dark nesting tables. Where the tabletop sculptures of city blocks address the macro view, these works help make visible the impact of destruction on individual domestic environments.

## subjective frame

- What is your immediate response to Ruttan’s sculptures?
- How do you interpret the state of destruction the buildings are in?

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Alison Ruttan’s work has been exhibited at Chicago Cultural Center; Frist Art Museum, Nashville; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas; California Museum of Photography at University of California, Riverside; Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago; Rocket Gallery, London; Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago; Directors Lounge, Berlin; and Sullivan Galleries at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her work is included in the collections of the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College, Chicago; University of California, Riverside; and Minneapolis Institute of Art, among others. Ruttan’s work has been reviewed in *Art in America*, *Chicago Tribune*, *ART/LTD*, *WBEZ-Chicago*, *Newcity Art*, and *Artslant*, among others. She has received awards from the Illinois Arts Council Agency, Jerome Foundation, and the Wexner Museum, among others. Ruttan is Associate Professor of Contemporary Practices at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

## structural frame

- How does Ruttan’s choice of medium relate to her subject matter?
- What formal qualities do you see repeated in Ruttan’s structures?



Installation view of *Unmaking of Places and Histories* at University Galleries of Illinois State University, 2019.

## cultural frame

- Do Ruttan's structures suggest agents of deterioration or destruction other than war?
- Are there qualities in Ruttan's sculptures that remind you of living spaces in your community?
- Where have you seen similar imagery in popular culture? How does this impact the way you perceive Ruttan's work?
- What contemporary events relate to the title *Unmaking of Places and Histories*?
- How does the removal of these structures from their original contexts affect the way you read them?
- How do the furniture sculptures relate to and reference the architectural structures?

## VOCABULARY

### CONTEXT

the situation in which something happens

### CONTEMPORARY

something that belongs to the present or current time

### CERAMIC

clay that has been hardened by heat

### SUBJECT MATTER

what is being depicted in an image or artwork

### SUBJECTIVE

something that is open to interpretation; up to the viewer to decide

### MEMORIAL

something that is made to focus on the memory of a person, a group of people, a place or a thing

### FORMAL QUALITIES

refers to elements and principles of design such as line, shape, color, balance, movement, contrast, and unity

### ARCHITECTURAL

in reference to buildings or structures

## EVENTS

- **Thursday, October 24 at 12pm:** Artist lecture at University Galleries
- **Friday, October 25 from 5 to 7pm:** Opening reception at University Galleries
- Field trip program, curator-led tours, and workshops available by appointment. Please contact University Galleries at [galleries@illinoisstate.edu](mailto:galleries@illinoisstate.edu) or 309.438.5487 to schedule an appointment.

\*Field trip stipends are available thanks to a Town of Normal Harmon Arts grant.

**ALL EVENTS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

## ART-MAKING ACTIVITIES

- Research a current event that is happening outside of your local community. Consider your perspective as an outsider looking in. Create a work or series of works that "bear witness from here."
- Analyze Ruttan's sculptures. Individually write about something that you have lost that was important to you. Create an artwork in response that functions as a memorial.
- What are common or repetitive narratives you see on the news? Choose a theme and collect related images. Create a sculpture in response to your theme. Collage or adorn the surface of your sculpture with the images you collected.
- Inspired by the title *Unmaking of Places and Histories*, create an artwork of a place, space, or object that is caught in the transition of being "unmade."
- Research destruction of cultural icons throughout history (temples, art, living spaces, etc...). Design a memorial for an object, space, or place that has been destroyed by conflict.



*Golden, 2019. Ceramic building and pit with wooden desk. Courtesy of the artist.*