

FOREWORD

Oh the beautiful, the sublime ruins!

From French: Denis Diderot, "Salon de 1761," *Œuvres esthétiques*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, "Classiques Garnier," 1959), p. 642.

Robert Ginsberg, in *The Aesthetics of Ruins*, provides entirely fresh perspectives on this vast subject. His direct and provocative style immediately persuades the reader to lay aside any existing preconceptions based on travel or past writings. The intriguing table of contents frames the exploration of ruins in much wider contexts, including the literary and philosophical traditions. Ginsberg goes beyond the verbal representations of his subject to embrace the visual implications of ruins in the traditional genres of architecture and sculpture and in contemporary media such as video and cinema. From yet another novel vantage point, he considers ruins as more than passive and static forms: as creations of active historical forces, human design, or natural processes. Building on these varied perspectives, in a moving climactic section, Ginsberg meditates on ruins as metaphors of individual and universal human experience.

Ginsberg's analyses of the visual aspects of ruins leads to a new appreciation of their formal unity and structures. He cogently examines the new roles of individual elements of buildings and places in forging renewed aesthetic identities. His sensitivity, based on many years of travel and reflection, brings to his discussions of varied groups of ruins an immediacy and richness of perception. Ranging from a wide array of monuments of ancient Greece and Rome to Medieval ruins of northern Europe and contemporary sites in the Middle East and the United States, a consistent vision ties together the abundant illustrations. Ginsberg transcends methods identified with one or another humanistic discipline to illuminate in a cogent and forceful manner essential aspects of human experience embodied in *The Aesthetics of Ruins*.

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