



ROME

PRESENT PASTS

HS 25 SEMINAR WEEK
20–25 OCTOBER 2025

Even if literary scientist Andreas Huyssen's analysis of memory politics in modern cities, 'Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory' (2003), does not discuss Rome, the city is a paradigmatic example of many concepts tackled in the study that are relevant to this day. Rome is essentially what Huyssen calls an urban palimpsest: a city with spatial layerings shaped by millennia of cultural history and imperial pasts—from the political instrumentalization of memory to the tendency to musealize a city so rich of artistic legacies. Is Rome still a living place or rather a scenery of the past?

During the seminar week, in city walks, museum and residency visits, we will explore the dynamic intersections of art, architecture and memory. Walking will be our primary mode of engagement, allowing us to trace the city's transformations over time. We will explore the city from many geocultural vantage points and visit art institutions such as MAXXI with its collection of art and architecture, Musei Capitolini and Museo della Civiltà Romana, each offering distinct perspectives on how Rome's past is preserved, interpreted, and reimagined in the present. We will also visit Centrale Montemartini, a former electricity power station turned museum with antique sculptures placed in industrial contexts, and EUR, the district planned under Mussolini as a symbol of fascist modernity—an essential site for critically engaging with questions of cultural heritage, ideology, and the shifting role of public spaces in contemporary urban life.

The seminar trip coincides with Rome Art Week, providing additional opportunities to experience the vibrant contemporary art scene within the city. Conceived as a dialog across time, participants are encouraged to consider how past narratives continue to shape present realities—and how artists and architects involve themselves and intervene in those narratives. Consequently, the seminar week fosters a deepened understanding of Rome beyond the notion of the city as an open-air museum, reflecting on Huyssen's concept of the 'memory boom', which can lead to history freezing instead of being critically remembered or productively transformed.

Cost Category: C (<750 CHF)

Includes accommodation, entry tickets, tours and two dinners.

Transportation Zürich ↔ Rome is not included in the costs and will have to be booked individually. Participants are responsible for travel documents and insurance.

Participants: 12

With Rosa Barba, Catherine Facerias, Martin Hartung

Chair of Art in Space and Time
Prof. Dr. Rosa Barba

