



"Ingenious idea" @francescaryan1

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THE ROMANCE AND BEAUTY OF DECAY



A crumbling building will always capture our attention, whether that's a weather-beaten castle in the Welsh Marches or a more recent structure like Sheffield's Ski Village. It's melancholy – all that human effort turning back to dust – but also somehow lovely. You can feel time passing as you stand and look.

Last year, French photographers Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre made column inches and page impressions all over the world with their evocative project on Detroit's crumbling buildings. But 'ruin porn' – technically a photography movement but generally the term given to our fascination with decaying structures – isn't a fad.

Tate Britain's new exhibition, *Ruin Lust*, opened yesterday, showing ruin art dating as far back as the 17th century. The show explores ruins closer to home: from the picturesque movement, when artists such as John Constable and JMW Turner captured the beauty of dilapidated countryside buildings, to south London's sprawling Heygate Estate.

"Every civilisation, no matter how great it is, may one day fall."

So why are ruins a pertinent topic now? According to Emma Chambers, one of *Ruin Lust*'s curators, they are continually popping up in modern art and popular discourse, making for a compelling subject. "The web has become a popular place for sharing images of ruined buildings and examining the idea of urban exploration and sites of pilgrimage," she says. "Artists, on the other hand, have a different take – they think about those buildings as a way of thinking about ideologies and politics, covering it from a more nuanced way. Look at Laura Oldfield Ford's work on the now-demolished Ferrier Estate in Greenwich: it's somewhere that is decayed and needs renewing but that is also tied into the issue of private companies coming in to regenerate social housing but excluding the residents.

"The ruin is a trigger for meditations and reflections on time, history and civilisation," she says. "If you take John Martin's *The Destruction Of Pompeii And Herculaneum*, it looks at the collapse of an imperial culture but it also makes the point that every civilisation, no matter how great it is, may one day fall."

But why are us everyday folk so enamoured with disrepair? "Leon Kossoff, whose painting *Demolition Of The Old House, Dalston Junction, Summer 1974* appears in the exhibition, says one of the reasons he focuses on demolitions is because demolition and building sites are part of the London he knows," says Chambers. "We live in a city that is constantly regenerating. The city is a living form, one that isn't static."

Psychologist Anna Hamer has another take on our fascination with wrecks: "Ruins can only suggest or hint at what used to exist; your creativity, dreams and fantasies fill in the rest of the picture. How often do we have this opportunity nowadays?" she says. "They give us the chance to use our imagination; to rekindle our childlike wonder. In a busy city they are also like an oasis, a space where we can escape chaos or mundanity. They allow us to inhabit a different world for a moment."

Ruin Lust, until 18 May 2014; 11; Tate Britain, Millbank, London SW1P

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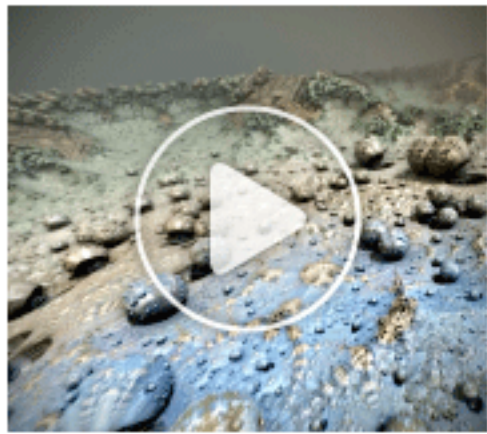


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WARNING: THIS IS A BIT TRIPPY

Imagine exploring the deserted set of a sci-fi film while under the influence of mind-altering substances. That goes some way to explaining the effect of this film by French animator Alexandre Lehmann. It's called *Overstepping Artifacts*, it is entirely computer-generated and is part of Lehmann's ongoing series, *Musicians With Guns*.



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The Reading Room

FOUR OF OUR FAVOURITE BOOKS ABOUT SPRING

1. *The Enchanted April* by Elizabeth von Arnim (Penguin Modern Classics, £8.99) Four women respond to an advert in *The Times* to spend a month sharing an Italian castle. The respondents' only similarities are their shared dissatisfaction with life and von Arnim paints a comedy picture of their settling-in period. However, their new surroundings quickly help to create enormous change for them.

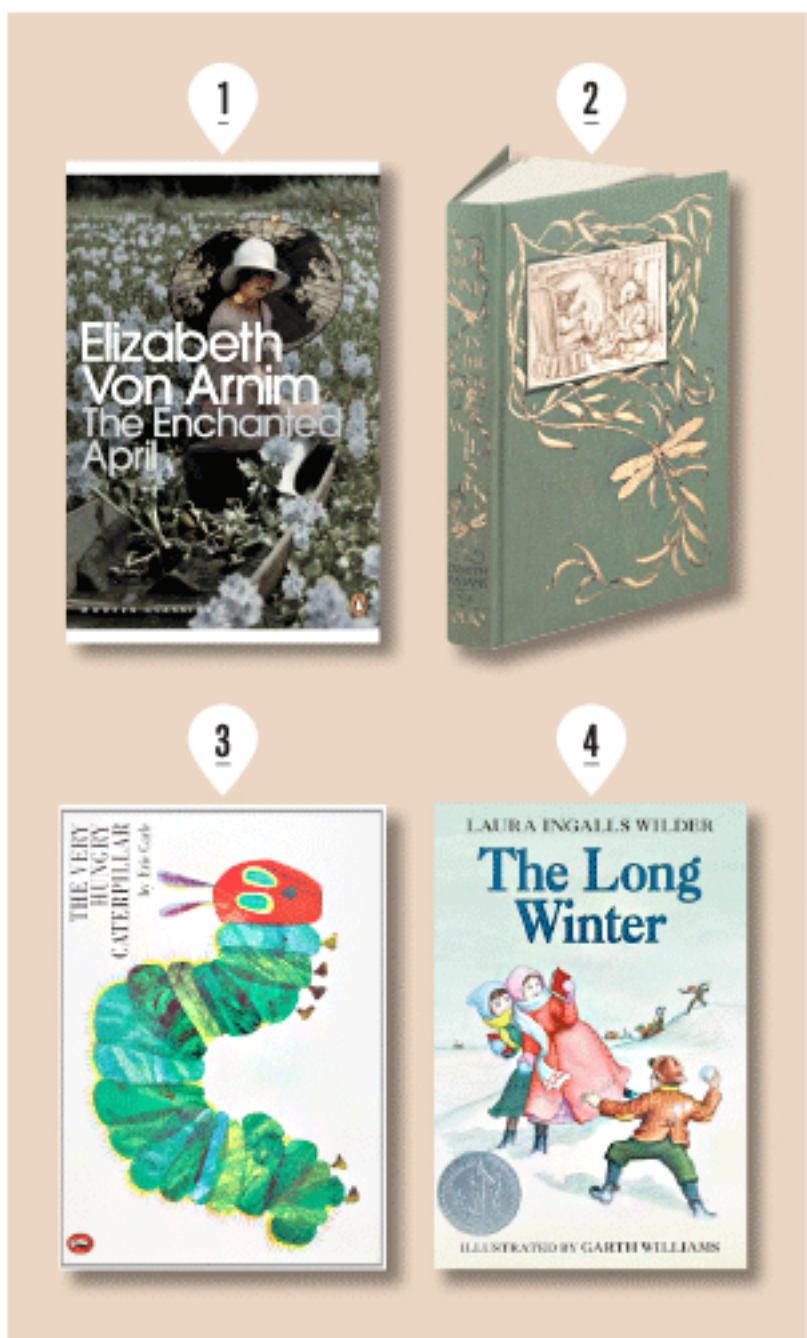
2. *The Wind In The Willows* by Kenneth Grahame (Folio Society, £34.95) "Spring was moving in the air above and in the earth below and around him, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house with its spirit of divine discontent and longing." Mole and Ratty make the most of the new season by heading off in Ratty's rowboat and paying a visit to the unpredictable Mr Toad.

3. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (Puffin, £10.99) "One Sunday morning the warm sun came up and – pop! – out of the egg came a tiny and very hungry caterpillar." Eric Carle's illustrated book will celebrate its 45th anniversary this summer and it still provides wonder, years after our first reading.

4. *The Long Winter* by Laura Ingalls Wilder (Random House, £20.85) Winter descends on the family's rural homestead, leaving them unable to attend school and with scarce food and fuel. It's a joyous moment when the spring thaw arrives bringing relief and their long-awaited Christmas presents – including a turkey.

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ON TOMORROW'S EMERALD STREET: SPRING HAS SPRUNG. EMBRACE IT.

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