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“Relics, Remnants, and Scrap: In Pursuit of the Genuine”

Abstract:

Many people testify to the thrill of encounters with ancient sites or with artifacts that have survived from the past. In such cases, even the most skillful replica, perceptually indiscernible from the “real thing,” does not provide an adequate substitute. I argue that genuine things can deliver an aesthetic encounter of a distinctive sort, one that can put us in the presence of the past; and that the sense of touch covertly operates in such experiences, sometimes in competition with vision (the traditional “aesthetic sense”). However, old objects are unlikely to be exactly the same as they were at their original making, having been damaged and restored, or even persisting only as fragments. I offer a partial set of conditions that count towards being genuine, but which also indicate diminishing possibilities for palpable encounters with the past.