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Tempus fugit, ars brevis

by Philippe de Montebello

On the ephemerality of art works.

I know that when I was asked to participate in this symposium it was most likely expected that I would lament today's obsession with obsolescence and the triumph of the ephemeral, and that I would proclaim the lasting qualities of art while decrying its diminishment in the culture at large and, in too many cases, the museum world as well.

I would, of course, be perfectly ready and willing to expatiate along those lines. In the hope of eliciting a more lively discussion, however, I have chosen to speak instead to that other melancholy reality, and this one is permanent, because it is in the nature of the thing—I am referring to the inherent fragility of works of art, their precarious existence, their surprising...

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