ABSTRACT The display of architectural fragments evokes a range of responses in the viewer: nostalgia for the past, resentment of the destruction of resources, admiration for the aesthetic beauty of the parts, or curiosity about what was lost. To some, these fragments symbolize lost preservation battles, or battles in which the whole was not adequately protected. To others, the retained fragments represent a victory, for at least a representational part of something that would have otherwise been lost in its entirety has been saved. Fragments, just as completely preserved buildings and monuments do, offer us a glimpse of the past and they provide information about early building practices and materials. They also encapsulate the ideas of a society at a particular time and place, and can be read as a social and historical narrative.

Philosophical debates in preservation regarding issues such as significance, context, authenticity, and integrity often take place when considering larger cultural resources, such as whole buildings and/or landscapes. But smaller artifacts, such as historic rooms or fragments thereof in a museum, are often left out of the discussion. As a result, the inclusion of fragments within the purview of preservation becomes questionable, forcing practitioners to ask: Is the retention and display of architectural fragments a valid and valuable form of historic preservation?