NEWSLETTER #2 OCTOBER 2025

OSLO CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES NEWSLETTER



LOOKING AHEAD, LOOKING BACK

This semester opened with energy and momentum at OCEH. As the year moves toward its close, we take a moment to highlight the people, projects, and ideas that have shaped these past months.

DEAR FRIENDS

The new semester has been full of life at OCEH. Over the past months, we've gathered around the Autumn Bonfire at our OCEH Social, shared ideas through lunch seminars and lab talks, and explored new perspectives during our PhD course *Ecosemiotics in the Field* and a recent workshop.

We're also delighted to welcome four guest researchers who are spending this semester with us, adding new voices and insights to our community. And as the year draws to a close, we've completed the selection of projects that will form the next phase of OCEH – beginning in January 2026.

Thank you for following along and for being part of this growing network of people, ideas, and collaborations in environmental humanities.

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AUTUMN 2025 AT OCEH: A SEASON OF ENCOUNTERS

As the leaves turned and the semester took shape, OCEH gathered people and ideas from across disciplines – around fires, in the lab, and out in the field. Here are some moments that stood out this autumn:

OCEH Social
Autumn Bonfire (Sep 10) – We kicked off the semester at Sognsvann with our annual bonfire: good conversation, pinnebrød, and the last of the late-summer sun.

Lunch Seminars
The Green Office at UiO (Sep 15) – On small steps toward a more sustainable university.
Erling Agøy (Oct 9) – How people in 17th-century China understood and lived with their weather.
Eli Skogerbø (Oct 10) – On Sámi politics and the colonial dynamics of "green growth."

Lab Talks
Timo Maran (Sep 2) – Ecosemiotics and the meanings that connect culture and nature.
Antonia Thomas (Sep 19) – Creative practice across disciplines.
Audra Mitchell (Sep 23) – Unconditional relationships with earth.
Stuart Earle Strange (Oct 22) – Anthropomorphism and cooperation beyond the human.
Karin Wagner (Oct 23) – The plastic worlds we live in.
Colin Sterling (Oct 29) – Museums, multispecies justice, and colonial infrastructures.

Workshops & Courses
Ecosemiotics in the Field (Sep 2–3) – A hands-on PhD course exploring meaning and relation along the Aker River.
Pollution-Generated Poetry? (Oct 8) – Turning air pollution data into poems with visiting scholar Stefano Rozzoni.

SEASON IN PICTURES



Timo Maran on ecosemiotics and the meanings that connect nature and culture.



Full room for Timo Maran's lecture on ecosemiotics at the University of Oslo.



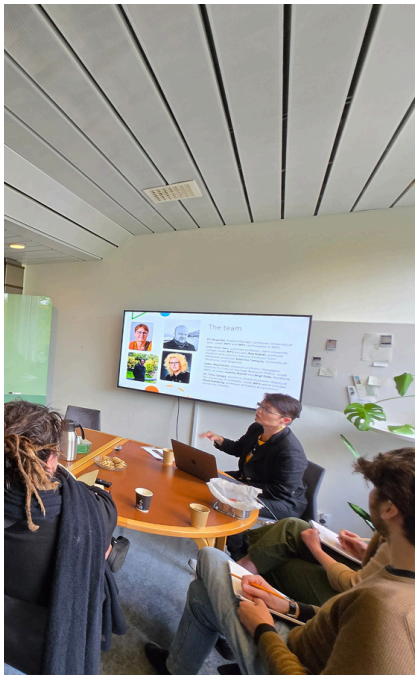
An autumn afternoon by the lake at Sognsvann.



Antonia Thomas speaking on creative practice in the humanities.



Exploring poetry, data, and AI with Stefano Rozzoni.



Eli Skogerbø speaking on Sámi politics and green growth at OCEH.

VISITING RESEARCHERS

OCEH is growing! This semester, we're happy to welcome four guest researchers whose insights and curiosity will bring new dimensions to our shared work.

KARIN WAGNER (OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2025)

Karin Wagner is a professor in Art History and Visual Studies at the Department of Cultural Sciences at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her research interests include design, sustainability, photography, digital culture, and visual communication.



SADIE HALE (AUGUST-DECEMBER 2025)

Sadie Hale is a PhD researcher with the SEATIMES project at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen. Her research explores human–whale relations in tourism contexts, drawing on fieldwork in the Norwegian Arctic and the Azores.



COLIN CONNORS (SEPTEMBER 2025-AUGUST 2026)

Colin Gioia Connors is a folklorist and medievalist researching sacred groves and shipbuilding in late Iron Age Scandinavia. His work spans Old Norse studies, landscape archaeology, Indigenous communities, and digital storytelling.



STEFANO ROZZONI (AUGUST-OCTOBER 2025)

Stefano Rozzoni is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow and Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Bergamo, Italy. His research focuses on environmental narratives in Anglophone literature and culture across different media and periods.





NEW RESEARCH GROUPS AT OCEH

This year, OCEH has grown in new and exciting ways. Through two calls for proposals – one for senior researchers and one for early-career scholars – we've welcomed eight new research groups into our community.

Together, these groups bring fresh ideas, creative energy, and a wide range of perspectives, from literature and art to history, theology, and media studies. They'll be exploring how the environmental humanities can connect people, disciplines, and ways of thinking – and we can't wait to see what emerges from their collaborations.



REAP – RITUAL, ECOLOGY, AFFECT, AND PERFORMATIVITY

Project period: January 2026 – June 2027
Project leader: Aike P. Rots, Department of Culture, Religion, Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (IKOS)

REAP explores how rituals – religious, civic, legal, and artistic – are shaped by and respond to the environments in which they take place. The project examines how such practices connect humans with nonhuman actors like animals, plants, spirits, laws, and even climate phenomena, both in the present and in earlier historical periods.

Bringing together researchers from fields including religious studies, anthropology, art history, archaeology, and literature, REAP creates a space for genuine cross-disciplinary dialogue. By linking ritual studies with the environmental humanities, the project seeks to better understand how ritual performances can express, transform, and sustain relationships between people and the more-than-human world.

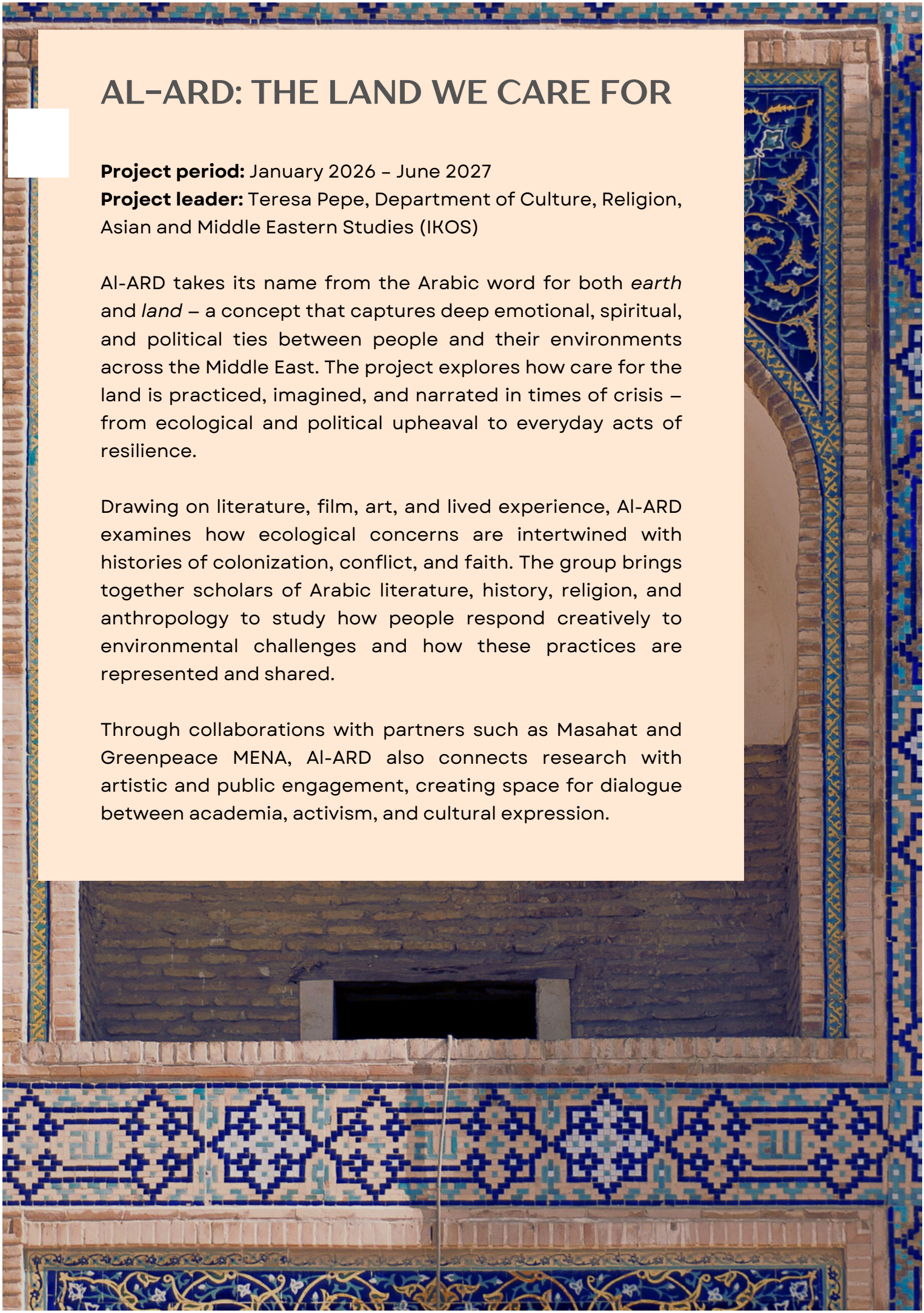
AL-ARD: THE LAND WE CARE FOR

Project period: January 2026 – June 2027
Project leader: Teresa Pepe, Department of Culture, Religion, Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (IKOS)

Al-ARD takes its name from the Arabic word for both *earth* and *land* – a concept that captures deep emotional, spiritual, and political ties between people and their environments across the Middle East. The project explores how care for the land is practiced, imagined, and narrated in times of crisis – from ecological and political upheaval to everyday acts of resilience.

Drawing on literature, film, art, and lived experience, Al-ARD examines how ecological concerns are intertwined with histories of colonization, conflict, and faith. The group brings together scholars of Arabic literature, history, religion, and anthropology to study how people respond creatively to environmental challenges and how these practices are represented and shared.

Through collaborations with partners such as Masahat and Greenpeace MENA, Al-ARD also connects research with artistic and public engagement, creating space for dialogue between academia, activism, and cultural expression.



JUNIOR RESEARCH GROUPS

Next semester, six new junior research groups will join OCEH, each led by an early-career scholar exploring fresh connections between people, places, and the environments we share.

Unstable Ecologies: Place-Based Sensory Storytelling

Project lead: Zack Abrams (ILN)

This project asks whether it is possible to develop tools that are both rigorous and creative to narrate the histories and futures of unstable local ecologies, and how creative writing can be informed and enriched by scientific research. Using place-based methods from across disciplines, the group explores the ecological, temporal, geological, colonial, and political layers around Oslo's boreal systems–investigating what the "field" can be in environmental humanities research, and what it means to build creative engagement into studies of disturbed and complex ecosystems.

Geoscience Disrupted: A Workshop on Anthropocene Sediment

Project lead: Alessandro Brunazzo (ILOS)

Geoscience Disrupted challenges us to rethink the world through its sediments and the forces that move them. Guided by the idea that everything shifting on Earth's surface is Anthropocene sediment, the group investigates how sediment is represented, what it signifies politically, and how global and local changes–from the spread of microplastics to extractive industries–reshape the planet's surface and its meanings.

Creative Agency and Environmental Humanities (CAEH): Art, Ecology, and New Pathways to Research

Project lead: Sarah Chen Huang (IFIKK)

Over the past two decades, contemporary art and the environmental humanities have become deeply intertwined. This project initiates an interdisciplinary conversation among art historians and artist-researchers from Norway and Asia to explore how creative practice functions as a method of eco-critical research. It investigates how the artist-researcher can foster ecological awareness and inspire actions that reach beyond academic contexts.

JUNIOR RESEARCH GROUPS

Soundshed

Project lead: Sadie Menicanin (IMV)

The Soundshed team investigates sound at the intersections of art, cultural heritage, ecology, and industry at Kistefos – a renowned sculpture park and museum on the site of a former paper pulp mill. Engaging creative and experimental methods, the project explores sonic presences and absences at Kistefos, considering how listening might reveal new understandings of place, memory, and environmental transformation.

Metabolic Sentinels

Project lead: George Cusworth (IFIKK)

This project explores the biopolitics of river health management and its intersections with the bodily wellbeing of wild swimmers. Focusing on the River Avon in southwest England, Metabolic Sentinels examines how swimmers and other citizens develop their own hydrological and microbiological knowledge–sometimes in uneven collaboration with scientists–and how these experiences of illness or toxicity can politicize water management. The project will culminate in a zine, a publication, and public events in the UK, Oslo, and Stockholm.

Sovereign Shell Striations: Scientific Expeditions, Ambient Archives, and the Colonization of South Varanger

Project lead: Sine Halkjelsvik Bjordal (IKOS)

This interdisciplinary project explores how scientific expeditions and natural history practices shaped territorial claims and colonial narratives in South Varanger. Drawing on decolonizing archival methods and ecological perspectives, the team investigates how nonhuman “archives” – such as freshwater mussel shells that record environmental histories – can speak where written sources fall silent. Through historical-ecological fieldwork and collaboration with Indigenous scholars, the project rethinks how history, science, and sovereignty intertwine in the Arctic borderlands.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE OCEH NETWORK

Designing Is Mining: Historicizing Material Ecologies of Design
Kjetil Fallan, Design Issues (MIT Press)

A position piece for the deXmat project, this article calls for closer attention to how materials move through design history – urging designers and historians to reckon with the extractive side of their field.

Crossing Boundaries: Rethinking "Japanese Religion" in the Anthropocene
Aike P. Rots, Japanese Journal of Religious Studies (Nanzan Institute)

Rots argues that Japanese religious studies must engage more directly with environmental questions and wider societal debates, drawing insights from the environmental humanities.

Effective Deoccupation: Towards Responsible Guardianship of Nature
Alejandra Mancilla, Journal of Political Philosophy

Revisiting the colonial doctrine of "effective occupation," Mancilla proposes its inverse – effective deoccupation – as a way to reimagine humanity's relationship with nature through care and responsibility rather than control.

Groundwork: Connecting Design, Materials, and Landscapes
Kjetil Fallan, Resistance: A Journal of Radical Environmental Humanities

This essay looks at how material extraction shapes landscapes and at the part design plays in both enabling and resisting extractive processes.

MORE PUBLICATIONS FROM THE OCEH NETWORK

(Re)made in China: Material (Dis)connections, Art and Creative Reuse
Edited by Anna Grasskamp – De Gruyter, 2025

A volume on creative reuse in art, craft, and design, tracing how discarded materials gain new cultural and aesthetic value across global networks. (Book launch in Oslo, December.)

Found Objects in Southern Chinese Craftsmanship and Design: Social Connections and Material Agency
Anna Grasskamp – in The Dynamics of Asian Design: Material Culture and Social Agency (Bloomsbury, 2025)

This chapter examines urban creative reuse practices in 21st-century Hong Kong, highlighting the social relationships formed through found materials.

Review of Pearls for the Crown by Mónica Domínguez Torres
Anna Grasskamp – XXI: Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte

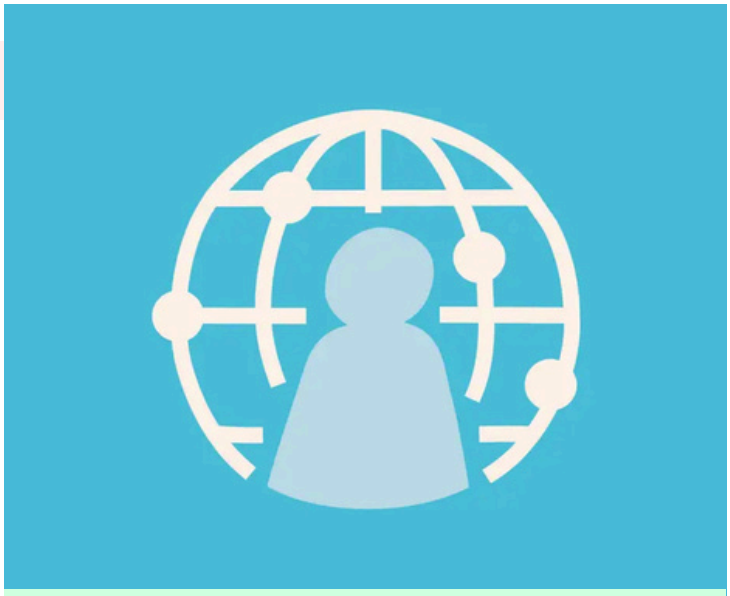
A review foregrounding ecological and decolonial perspectives in early modern art histories.

Related Exhibition

Art of Upcycling (Exhibition, GRASSI Museum Leipzig, 2024)
Research by Anna Grasskamp informed both the exhibition and the above publications.

The exhibition explored how discarded objects are reworked in contemporary art and craft, closely linked to the themes developed in *(Re)made in China* and *The Dynamics of Asian Design*.

NETWORKING & COLLABORATION



UARCTIC THEMATIC NETWORK ON ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

OCEH is now part of the new UArctic Thematic Network on Environmental Humanities, which brings together researchers across the Arctic to strengthen interdisciplinary approaches to environmental questions.

Our own **Sonja Åman** has been selected as one of the network's co-leaders, and we're excited to join this community as it takes shape.

If you're interested in learning more or exploring possibilities for collaboration and cross-Arctic mobility, feel free to get in touch.

About the network

CONNECT WITH OCEH

We've opened a new page on the OCEH website gathering all the ways to take part in our work.

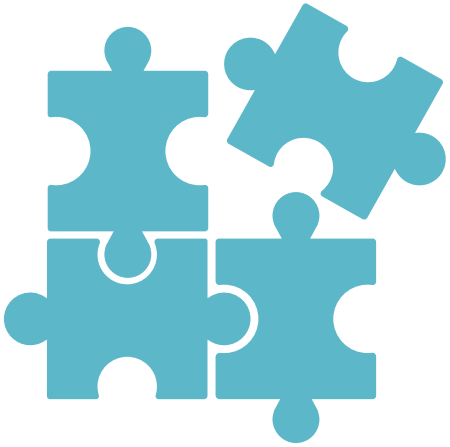
OCEH is a meeting place for research, teaching, and creative practice – and we're always interested in new collaborations.

You can:

- give a talk or organise an event
- join as an affiliate or visiting scholar
- apply for OCEH funding
- or share an idea for something new.

We'd love to hear from you!

Get involved



DID YOU KNOW THAT...



TREES CAN TALK UNDERGROUND?

Many forests are connected by fungal networks that transfer nutrients, signals, and even warnings between trees – a system some scientists call the “wood-wide web.”

Did you know that tress can talk to each other?

Not in words, of course – but through underground networks of fungi.

Most trees form symbiotic relationships with mycorrhizal fungi, which connect their roots and allow them to exchange nutrients, water, and even chemical signals. This hidden system – sometimes called the “wood-wide web” – lets plants warn each other about threats like pests or drought, and even support younger or weaker neighbors.

Scientists have discovered that these fungal networks can also transmit electrical signals, adding yet another layer of communication in the soil.

It’s a fascinating reminder: forests aren’t just collections of individual trees – they’re communities, quietly connected beneath our feet.



COMING SOON

The semester's final weeks bring together new voices, shared research, and a little December warmth – from art and ecology to food systems and festive gløgg.

- **Nov 14 – OCEH Research Groups Meet 2025**

An afternoon at Tøyen Hovedgård where current and new OCEH research groups come together to share projects and plans.

- **Nov 18 – Lunch Seminar: George Cusworth – Digitally Mediated Planetary Encounters**

George Cusworth explores how data-driven food systems create new ways of linking diet, metabolism, and planetary change.

- **Nov 27 – Symposium: Curating 'the Wild' – Environmental Approaches to Art History**

At the National Museum, Isabelle Gapp and Dehlia Hannah discuss how art and curatorial practice can respond to ecological transformation.

- **Dec 15 – Lunch Seminar + Julegløgg: Sadie Menicanin**

We close the semester with a talk by Sadie Menicanin, followed by a seasonal gathering with gløgg and conversation.

Find details and registration links on our website and social channels.

WHO WE ARE AT OCEH

Meet the Team Creating the Center



HUGO REINERT
Head of OCEH

Hugo is an Associate Professor of Cultural History and Environmental Humanities at the University of Oslo, and since 2025 he has served as the head of OCEH. His research spans topics from forests to deep-sea environments, with a special focus on how human and nonhuman worlds intersect.

As the center's second leader, Hugo continues to guide OCEH's growing community of researchers and students, strengthening its role as a hub for environmental humanities in Norway and beyond.



KAROLINA POLTORAK
Admin. Coordinator

Karolina serves as Adviser and Administrative Coordinator at OCEH, overseeing the center's daily operations and supporting the OCEHLab. She brings together project management, administrative guidance, event planning, and research support to help OCEH run smoothly day-to-day.



SONJA IRENE ÅMAN
Lab Manager

Sonja is a Postdoctoral Fellow in Environmental Humanities at the University of Oslo, where she explores the politics and cultural histories of marine life – like herring migrations and Indigenous whaling practices.

Trained as an interdisciplinary environmental humanities researcher, Sonja weaves together environmental history, political ecology, and rich storytelling to examine how people and nonhuman worlds intersect.

STAY CONNECTED



Want to keep up with OCEH between newsletters? Visit our website for news, updates, and upcoming events – and follow us on social media for more.

hf.uio.no/oceh

We are on Bluesky and Facebook:

Edited by Karolina Poltorak, on behalf of the Oslo Center for Environmental Humanities.