NEWSLETTER #4 FEBRUARY 2026

OSLO CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES NEWSLETTER



NEW ROOTS, SHARED STORIES

The new year has opened with a focus on the deep connections between ecology, storytelling, and ritual. As we move into February, we highlight the projects and voices exploring how we live with – and narrate – our changing world.

DEAR FRIENDS

Rather than marking the passage of time, we are celebrating a transformation. This January, the selection process of the past year culminated in the official start of our new research community. Seeing these projects move from proposals to active collaborations has brought a renewed sense of purpose to our halls.

From the ritual practices of REAP and the environmental care-work of al-ARD to the place-based storytelling of our junior teams, the "next phase" of OCEH is no longer a plan – it is happening. We are thrilled to see how these diverse perspectives on land, memory, and ecology will cross-pollinate as we open this new chapter together. Thank you for being part of this momentum.

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ART, SOILS, AND STORYTELLING: OCEH EVENTS JAN–FEB 2026

Our recent program has brought together diverse perspectives on everything from the politics of plants to the memory of ancestral remains. Here is a look at the conversations that have shaped the start of our semester:

- *How We Write Crises While We're Within Them* (Feb 12) – Zack Abrams led an outdoor lunch seminar at Frognerseteren, discussing how community-based writing helps us navigate intersecting crises.

- *Drawing Session & Film Screening with Zheng Bo* (Feb 9) – A day-long encounter with artist Zheng Bo exploring how plants practice politics through drawing at Victoriahuset and film screenings at Kunstnernes Hus.

Organised by the REAP research group.

- *Theogenic Soils and Forests in the Blang Mountains* (Feb 3) – Daniel Mohseni Kabir Bäckström led a reading group on how changing relations between humans, gods, and soils have led to environmental crises in China.

Organised by the Anthropogenic Soils project in collaboration with OCEH.

- *Reading Cities of Salt* (Feb 3) – The Al-ARD Book Club's first meeting discussed Abdel Rahman Munif's novel, exploring environmental disruption and care for the land in the Middle East.

Organised by the al_ARD research group.

- *Against the Planetary* (Jan 12) – Kasia Paprocki and Michael Levien unpacked "carbon fetishism" and the politics of climate change solutions in Bangladesh and Louisiana.

Organised by the Centre for South Asian Democracy in collaboration with OCEH.

- *Human Remains and Indigenous Activism* (Jan 8) – Marius Palz presented research on memorial rituals among the Ainu and Okinawans as a response to colonial violence.

Organised by the REAP research group.

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WELCOMING OUR NEW GUEST RESEARCHER



INTRODUCING VISITING RESEARCHER GIULIA GIRARDI

One of the most rewarding parts of a new semester is the arrival of visiting scholars who bring new questions and international contexts into our shared space. This month, we are very happy to have **Giulia Girardi** joining us.

During February and March, the Lab is hosting **Giulia Girardi**, a scholar specializing in the environmental history of material culture.

Giulia joins us from Ca' Foscari University of Venice, where she earned her MA in Environmental Humanities. Her research examines the ethical dimensions of the fashion industry, specifically looking at how transformations in fur design and manufacturing mirror our changing attitudes toward the non-human world.

Throughout her stay, she will be conducting archival work in Oslo's libraries to explore the environmental footprint of textile production and multispecies ethics in garment design. Giulia's previous work includes initiatives in circular fashion and textile up-cycling in both Canada and Italy.

You can find more details on Giulia's background and her current research on her OCEH profile page.

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WHAT'S NEW ON OUR WEBSITE



Photo: Dana Andreaa Gheorghe, Unsplash

✦ FROM THE BLOG

Meet our Guest Researchers: Trees, Tales, and Sacred Groves

We recently spent some time with folklorist Colin Gioia Connors to discuss his work on Viking Age "sacred groves." It is a fascinating conversation about how the names we give to the woods actually dictate how we treat them – and why Colin believes "thinking like a tree" is a necessary skill for the 21st century.

👉 Read the interview on our blog

NEW PROJECT PAGE

Unstable Ecologies: Place – Based Sensory Storytelling

We are happy to announce that the project page for Unstable Ecologies is now live. Zack Abrams and his team are diving into Oslo's boreal systems using a unique mix of scientific research and creative storytelling.
If you're interested in joining their upcoming "Days Out" excursions, you can find the full schedule, team details, and project goals on the new site.

👉 Visit the project page

DID YOU KNOW THAT...



A VOLCANIC ERUPTION CREATED FRANKENSTEIN?

In 1815, Mount Tambora erupted, plunging the world into a "Year Without a Summer." The freezing, volcanic gloom trapped a group of writers indoors in Switzerland – sparking the creation of the world's most famous monsters.

Did you know that a volcano can change the history of literature?

When Indonesia's Mount Tambora erupted in 1815, the resulting ash cloud blocked the sun and caused global temperatures to plummet. By 1816, snow fell in July across Europe and North America.

That same "ungenial" summer, Mary Shelley and her friends were vacationing at Lake Geneva. Trapped inside by the endless storms, they held a contest to write the most frightening ghost story to pass the time.

In that dark, volcanic atmosphere, 19-year-old Mary Shelley conceived ***Frankenstein***, and John Polidori wrote ***The Vampyre***. It is a powerful reminder that geological forces don't just shape our climate– they haunt our culture and spark our greatest myths.

COMING SOON

As our spring calendar continues to take shape, we already have several highlights to look forward to over the coming weeks:

- **Mar 16 – Minifestival: Museer, kulturarv og bærekraft**

A half-day seminar exploring how the Norwegian museum sector is engaging with the climate crisis. The afternoon features project presentations from the National Museum, Norsk Folkemuseum, and the Natural History Museum.
Note: This event is held in Norwegian and requires pre-registration.

- **Mar 27 – Anne-Maria Magga: Siida laws**

Reindeer herder and scholar Anne-Maria Magga joins us to discuss Sámi political and legal thought. She will explore how traditional legal principles regarding human-animal relations and land ownership challenge Western theories of governance.

- **Apr 7 – Al-Ard Book Club: Where the Wind Calls Home**

For our next gathering, the Al-Ard group will lead a relaxed discussion on Samar Yazbek's latest novel. We will look at how literature can capture the quiet, everyday resilience of people and land in Syria.

We are still adding more talks and workshops to the program for the months ahead. For the latest updates and registration details, please keep an eye on our events page.

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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.

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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.