

# OPEN CALL

# OCEAN / UNI

## STUDIES IN BLUE AGENCY

### SIX GLOBAL TALES AGAINST ECO-ANXIETY

#### OCEAN / UNI FALL 2022 SEMESTER

October 5 – December 14, 2022

Online via Zoom and on Ocean-Archive.org

- » 6 biweekly public sessions
- » 4 small-scale activations

**OCEAN / UNI is an art–activism–law–science learning initiative**, online, tuition free, and open to the general public. The curriculum invites fluid thinking with the Ocean as a way to move towards more amphibious actions, beyond the binaries of land and sea. Aiming to complement and enhance land-based understanding of the Earth, it covers a wide range of ecological, political, aesthetic, ethical, and scientific topics around the realities and futures of the Ocean.

The fall semester of **OCEAN / UNI 2022** is curated and developed by **Louise Carver**, Human Geographer and Political Ecologist, TBA21–Academy Head of Knowledge Practices; **Pietro Consolandi**, OCEAN / UNI Research Lead, Artist and Writer; and **Mekhala Dave**, Law and Policy Analyst & Researcher; alongside **Aleksandra Czerniak**, Digital Project & Transformation Manager; **Michal Kučerák**, Digital Content Manager; **Petra Linhartová**; Head of Digital & Innovation; **Fiona Middleton**, Research & Community, and **Markus Reymann**, Director of TBA21–Academy.  
Graphic design: **Lana Jerichová**.

Produced with care by the TBA21–Academy team.



## STUDIES IN BLUE AGENCY: SIX GLOBAL TALES AGAINST ECO-ANXIETY

### // FALL SEMESTER 2022

The fifth cycle of OCEAN / UNI, *Studies in Blue Agency*, departs from case studies that embody critical aspects of our ecological times, expanding them on a wider scale—from the specific to the planetary level—to identify existing and emergent strategies of response. It is said that eco-anxiety can be alleviated through exercising agency or having an actual or perceived ability to act. Yet agency is not an exclusive feat of the rational human, or even collectives; it proliferates across complex assemblages of non-human actors and systems. It is necessary to acknowledge all elements of the biosphere as *agents*, creating relational bonds and effects that structurally modify the planet at all times. Together with them, it is possible to imagine a different planet: one that is not only conserved to survive, but even regenerated for mutual abundance.

Unfolding throughout Fall 2022, the six live sessions narrate strategies for adapting and attuning to the shifting frictions among "us", our other-than-human neighbors, and the biosphere. The regional case studies contain critiques but also examples of affirmative interventions from ocean ecosystem regeneration, adaptation, activism, policy transformation, and social justice. In this context, art and humanities allow us to research the world *together* with other disciplines, becoming more than mere means of communication. Activism morphs from a political movement to a creative force: a fluid expression of our time and of the necessity to act, an essential request for access to agency that intersects the growing human desire for eco-justice with the power of more-than-human assemblages.

By foregrounding questions of agency and influence, and staging the entire semester as a structured methodological enquiry, *Studies in Blue Agency* charts who and what is playing which role in situated geographic case studies and Ocean policy domains—in other words, who and what has the capacity to act and with what effects? OCEAN / UNI builds on rich understandings of the myriad and alarming ecological tales that demand to be told, to explore multifarious practices and agencies coalescing with world-building effects. In tracing how and why such worlds have emerged and are sustained, but also challenged in practice, we envisage new worlds—regenerative, just and ultimately livable ones—that might also be ushered into existence.

### // WHO CAN PARTICIPATE & REGISTRATION

The program is intended for anyone eager to engage in deepening their relations with the ecological, political, aesthetic, ethical, and scientific knowledges around the realities and futures of the Ocean. Lectures will be held in English, so a good listening and speaking level is recommended to ensure meaningful exchange.

Participants are required to register for their attendance to the program online via Zoom. Due to limited capacity applicants will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis. You are welcome to register in advance for more than one session. If you attend five sessions or more, you will receive an official certificate of attendance.

» [Registration form here.](#)

Access to the detailed program, session recordings, and additional study materials are provided through the ocean comm/uni/ty platform. These can be found in the [OCEAN / UNI](#) area.

» [Join ocean comm/uni/ty here](#)

### // PROGRAM

The program begins with a Prologue on October 5, which introduces the ideas and approaches of the curriculum. These are unfolded through five overarching themes presented during the main sessions, which take place every other Wednesday. Five corresponding "activations" (small interactive workshops designed and held by the OCEAN / UNI curatorial team in which participants are invited to engage and respond) are offered to deepen the understanding of stories, case studies, and methodologies from the main sessions. Activations open for registration on the ocean comm/uni/ty on the day of the corresponding main session.

Guests are present live on Zoom. All times in CET.



## SESSION 1: STUDIES IN BLUE AGENCY: A PROLOGUE FOR CLIMATE ACTION

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Date: Wednesday, 5 October, 6.00–7.30 pm

- » Welcome note: **Markus Reymann**, TBA21–Academy Director
- » Moderator: **Pietro Consolandi**, OCEAN / UNI Research Lead, Artist and Writer
- » Keynote speaker: **Abhayraj Naik**, Environmental Lawyer, Educator and Activist, Co-Founder of Initiative for Climate Action

How do we collectively build an equitable world in the face of climate anxiety? How do we become the transformative agents we need to be in times of ecological collapse? How do we nourish the sprouting of ideas that can lead to change? How can movements impact law-making, and which tools are there to be used?

Abhayraj Naik, lawyer, educator, and activist from India, builds upon these questions from learning and unlearning techniques sited in ecological philosophy, and from his ongoing multi-faceted practice. His deeply rooted experiences in the Global South span collaborative community-led initiatives through law-making processes, which produce mutual impacts and resonances in policy and beyond. More than a conscious approach, this shared act of empowerment becomes a healing journey of reciprocal care in the face of climate change. In the fertile space where art, activism, and storytelling fuse, we launch a semester that proposes agency and mutual empowerment as an antidote to eco-anxiety.

## SESSION 2: SECURING SMALL-SCALE FISHING JUSTICE WITHIN OCEAN CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

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Date: Wednesday, 19 October, 6.00–7.30 pm

- » Moderator: **Louise Carver**, Human Geographer and Political Ecologist, and TBA21–Academy Head of Knowledge Practices
- » Guests:
  - Monieba Isaacs**, Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape, regional coordinator and founding member of *Too Big To Ignore*, a global partnership for the future of small-scale fisheries;
  - Muhammad Arju**, ICCA Territories of Life (TBC)

Conservation is not just a question of humans versus nature. Like conservation or restoration efforts on land, the spatial politics of who can access, cultivate, extract, and control ocean spaces are paramount not only to questions of justice and equity but also to the likely effectiveness of these environmental interventions. Fifty million people worldwide make their living directly

from small-scale fishing, and around one billion benefit from the protein they procure. The nearshore and reef areas that are popular fishing grounds are also very often sites of formerly high but dramatically diminishing marine biodiversity. Protected areas, no-take zones, and a range of other ocean uses and impacts increasingly intermingle in these fluid spaces. What are the best examples of initiatives that work beyond human–nature binaries to reflect this fluidity, and that emphasize justice, wellbeing, and indigenous or community rights? What are some of the pervasive challenges and complexities of trying to do so? We hear from those working at the forefront of activism, research, and creative practice to secure small-scale fisher justice in combination with—and for the sake of—protecting and regenerating marine biodiversity.

**Activation:** Wednesday, 26 October, 6.00–7.30 pm

## SESSION 3: MOVING BEYOND ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE AND ECO-SYNDROMES

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Date: Wednesday, 2 November, 6.00–7.30 pm

- » Moderator: **Pietro Consolandi**, OCEAN / UNI Research Lead, Artist and Writer
- » Guests:
  - Aylin Ulman**, Marine Biologist, Founder of Mersea Consulting;
  - Mert Gökalp**, Marine Biologist and Filmmaker

In the Sea of Marmara, a semi-enclosed basin where humans and fish are totally entangled, pollution and overfishing have caused major ecological harm to the forms of life within and around it. Rhythms of change have reached an unprecedented level, especially around the aquatic metropolis of Istanbul. Associated with these dramatic declines in biodiversity, is a parallel impoverishment of the imagination or what has been defined as "shifting baseline syndrome". With each successive ecological regime change and loss, fading memories of prior abundances slowly fix understandings of the ecosystem's current status as the only possible one. But given the possibility, it has been shown that the sea can regenerate itself. We look into the creative, regenerative properties of the Sea of Marmara as an example for other bodies of water, exploring its possible futures with local experts who have taken creative paths from marine biology.

**Activation:** Wednesday, 9 November, 6.00–7.30 pm

## SESSION 4: THINKING WITH THE SEABED: THE FUTURE OF OCEAN EXTRACTIVISM

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Wednesday, 16 November, 6.00–7.30 pm

- » Moderator: **Mekhala Dave**, Law and Policy Analyst & Researcher, TBA21–Academy
- » Guests:  
**Dr. Patricia Esquete**, Deep Sea Biologist, University of Aveiro, Portugal;  
**Clement Yow Mulalap**, Legal Advisor to Federated States of Micronesia and International Environmental Lawyer, Blue Ocean Law

Through TBA21–Academy's program *Culturing the Deep Sea*, the fourth session brings us to the remote and mysterious playgrounds of the deep sea; or, a democratic realm of the Ocean that belongs to all of humankind; or, a type of marine environment shaped by depth, darkness, and nutrient influx. Such narratives and images control the visions and perceived responsibilities of those with agency over the deep sea—no small matter as the deep seabed is hotly contested by actors wishing to control it. The wealth of minerals waiting at the seabed are more than a twinkle in the eyes of mining companies, who continue to advance mining plans even as the international regulatory body (the United Nations' International Seabed Authority) and its attending States assemble the operational and environmental rules for doing so. Science is raising alarms about the irreversible damage posed to the marine environment by deep sea mining, and amidst momentum from States and industries, we ask: What narratives are forming around deep sea mining? Who has agency over our high seas and the minerals? How do we redefine our relations with the Ocean and non-human features of the Ocean, also learning from Indigenous knowledge systems to decolonize shared legal frameworks?

**Activation:** Wednesday, 23 November, 6.00–7.30 pm  
Special Guest: **Pradeep Singh**, Legal Expert on Deep Sea Mining

## SESSION 5: PERFORMING BLUE DE-GROWTH

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Date: Wednesday, 30 November 6.00–7.30 pm

- » Moderator: **Louise Carver**, Human Geographer and Political Ecologist, and TBA21–Academy Head of Knowledge Practices
- » Guests:  
**John Childs**, Lancaster University Environment Center;  
**Massa Lemu**, Visual Artist and Writer (TBC)

Among the many ways of speaking about and representing the Ocean, the "blue growth" narrative has become prominent across ocean policy and business domains. Hailed as the solution to eradicate poverty, support innovation, and stimulate further economic growth in a range of ocean sectors—from deep-sea mining to shipping, coastal tourism, and blue carbon markets—blue growth is upheld as a key strategy in alignment with long-held notions of the Ocean as economic frontier. In challenging arguably the *final* frontier and policy orthodoxy of economic growth in general, de-growth is a strengthening area of ecological economic theory and practical experimentation for sustainable contraction towards wellbeing economies for humans and nature. What would it look like to actively build narratives and enact blue *de*-growth? What kinds of practices in research, arts, and activism can contest and re-claim the economics of ocean life? We hear how case studies of community artistic practices are contributing to resisting growth and then owning the alternatives.

**Activation:** Wednesday, 7 December, 6.00–7.30 pm

## SESSION 6: A FUTURE VERNACULAR? FOREGROUNDING LOCALIZED KNOWLEDGES FOR FUTURE-BUILDING

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Date: Wednesday, 14 December 6.00–7.30 pm

- » Moderator: **Pietro Consolandi**, OCEAN / UNI Research Lead, Artist and Writer
- » Guests:  
**Rashad Salim**, Expeditionary Artist and Activist;  
**Second Guest** TBC

In the epilogue we adopt a poetic, scientific, and artistic lens to speculate on reviving historical, heritage and vernacular material cultures for the future. Exploring the traditions of convivial, low-impact ocean technology including indigenous architecture and artefacts, the closing session asks whether there is scope to enfold and incorporate these within the accelerating anthropocene technosphere to support greater co-existence and regenerative material cultures. We explore scope for foregrounding and privileging design innovations built on highly localized and relational knowledges to counter the abstracting, alienating and destructive design paradigms of industrial capitalism. Being guided by humanities, arts, and science, we consider possibilities, in which humans might be able to align their metabolic energy rhythms, cultures and practices with those of planetary ecosystems and fellow non-human inhabitants. The imagined position is not a step backwards to a romanticised past, but rather a move to re-evaluate the paradigms of technology to take a step forward towards a future vernacular.

## // OCEAN / UNI

Initiated by Daniela Zyman in 2020, **OCEAN / UNI** is a collaborative learning initiative developed by TBA21–Academy for higher education institutions, independent researchers, practitioners, and Ocean enthusiasts that encourages building a far-reaching network and developing a transdisciplinary methodology. Established as part of the programming around the exhibition *Territorial Agency: Oceans in Transformation*, OCEAN / UNI is conceived as a collaborative pedagogic space that invites fluid thinking with the Ocean.

As we continue to make sense of our relationship to the environment, the transformations of the Ocean become central sites of learning and research. It is urgent to find possibilities for the Ocean to become a space of knowledge exchange that bridges differences and offers modes of learning from each other. OCEAN / UNI explores not only new educational formats, but also ways of connecting thinkers, artists, research, and activist groups.

OCEAN / UNI is a space:

- » to create a **different temporality, to give continuity to some of our conversations and relationships.**
- » for creating **trans-disciplinary conversations**, connecting the work of different research groups in different institutions and locations, facilitating new collaborations.
- » for **doing things together**, through collective readings, study sessions, or collaboration on a case study, where we can become more granular and specific in smaller working groups.
- » for connecting with other **educational platforms, approaches, pedagogies, and methodologies.**

The Curriculum aims to provide students, researchers, and the public with wide-ranging and accessible explorations through regular live sessions, reading groups, small-scale workshops or activations, collective visual notebooks, an online archive of gathered knowledge and materials, and through the ocean comm/uni/ty.

**ocean comm/uni/ty** is a feature of the Ocean-Archive.org, a user-friendly meeting place for diving deep and crossing disciplines. In concert with OCEAN / UNI and Ocean-Archive.org, ocean comm/uni/ty forms an immersive three-pronged ecosystem for learning, discovering, and gathering. As the online portal to access the ongoing and past programs of OCEAN / UNI, ocean comm/uni/ty harbors collaboration and offers a space for researchers, practitioners, and ocean lovers of all stripes to exchange knowledge and seek inspiration; to share and promote their work; to spark and maintain collaborations.

## Upcoming live modules:

- » Studies in Blue Agency: Six global tales against eco-anxiety (Fall 2022)
- » Mediterraneans: 'Thus waves come in pairs' (after Etel Adnan) - second cycle (Spring 2023)
- » Deep Sea (Fall 2023 and Spring 2024)

## Modules available:

- » ["Imagine the Ocean Dry as Lavender" – Mediterraneans as Hotspot for Climate Change and Adaptation](#) (Spring 2022)
- » [How to Wade Through Water? Storytelling as a Method](#) (Fall 2021)
- » [Ocean Commons – Reclaiming the Common Oceans](#) (Spring 2021)
- » [7 Seas, Oceans in Transformation](#) (Fall 2020)

## // 2020–2022 ACADEMIC PARTNERS

AA Architectural Association School of Architecture, London

Brera Academy, Milan, Italy

Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy

Columbia University, NY, USA

GEO—DESIGN, Design Academy Eindhoven, The Netherlands

Hochschule Mainz: University of Applied Sciences, Germany

Lancaster University, UK

Institut Kunst, FHNW Academy of Art and Design, Basel, Switzerland

NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway

Salon Swiss / Bern University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland

## // CRITICAL OCEAN LITERACY

The methodologies of OCEAN / UNI aim to create spaces of collaborative work, coalitional thinking,<sup>1</sup> and solidarity to generate new pedagogies and ways of researching that go beyond words, grown from feeling. This sensitivity to the oceanic elaborates a critical ocean literacy that extends a factual comprehension of the mutual influence between us and the Ocean, moving deeper into thinking through the Ocean.

Performed individually and collectively, such acts can blend in different kinds of knowledge and release us from coded connections to wander through the ocean's rhythms, poetry, and biology; through these fluid processes of hybridization we might come to grasp and communicate our ecological crisis.

Learning through sensing, familiarity, and the body can ignite joy and healing, can grow affinity with otherness. Telling stories—and coming together to listen—can access cosmic timescales, can weave motives and planetary movements into the spaces between data points. How do the ways in which we talk to each other, gather, listen, and learn matter and create kinship? By welcoming worldviews originating in different densities and humidities, latitudes and altitudes, perhaps a new critical perspective could arise, one that can tell the story of the fragile interconnectedness of our biosphere, empowering humans and nonhumans to wade toward a space of balanced coexistence.

### CALL FOR STORIES of OCEAN / UNI: Studies in Blue Agency

Along with participation in the sessions, we are commissioning Stories to accompany each session and add another perspective to the featured topics. In the following months, we will be swimming through cases of successful community building and grassroots movements, small-scale fishing and conservation, the relationship between humans and their watery ecosystems from a fish's perspective, issues of deep-sea mining, as well as the idea of blue degrowth.

This is a call to OCEAN / UNI participants and ocean comm/uni/ty members who find any of the topics of this coming semester especially resonant and would like to be featured with their writing on Ocean-Archive.org's Stories page.

See more details and directly apply via this [Google Form](#).

**TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary**—based in Madrid and Vienna, with situated projects in Venice and Cordoba—is a leading international art and advocacy foundation created in 2002 by the philanthropist and collector Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza. All activity of the foundation is fundamentally driven by artists and the belief in art and culture as a carrier of social and environmental transformation and change. TBA21 is continually extending its advocacy work by sparking new collaborations across the arts, humanities and sciences, partnering with other research and educational organizations, and municipalities and communities around the world.

In 2011, TBA21 established the research center **TBA21–Academy**, a cultural ecosystem fostering a deeper relationship to the Ocean through the lens of art to inspire care and action. For a decade, the Academy has been an incubator for collaborative research, artistic production, and new forms of knowledge by combining art and science. In 2019, TBA21–Academy inaugurated **Ocean Space** in Venice, a planetary center for exhibitions, research, and public programs catalyzing critical ocean literacy through the arts, and Ocean-Archive.org, a digital organism for a living ocean; a platform in the making, an archive and framework for collaborative research.

**Ocean-Archive.org** is an online platform that investigates the potential of storytelling and transdisciplinary collaboration within and beyond archival practices. It strives to expand critical ocean literacy in a time of great necessity and catalyses collective action for a living Ocean. The aim of Ocean-Archive.org is to bring together the multitude of voices and **Stories** around the Ocean and connect those striving to nurture and protect it. With [ocean comm/uni/ty](#), the platform aligns conversations around the Ocean so that the members can find each other, connect, and join forces. Designed as a storytelling and pedagogical tool, Ocean-Archive.org translates current knowledge into a shared language that fosters synergy among art, science, policy, and conservation and enables us to make better decisions for urgently needed policies.

