

Sea Machines (online, 4 Feb 22)

online / John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, University of Toronto, Feb 04, 2022

Jason Nguyen

SEA MACHINES is a one-day symposium (held on Zoom) that interrogates marine technology for the history and theory of architecture. From canoes and cargo ships to submarines and offshore drilling rigs, maritime vessels show how design has been employed to imagine, manoeuvre, conquer, and exploit the environments and ecosystems of the sea.

SYMPOSIUM THEME

The sea has long been cast as the inverse of the habitable terracentric world. Depictions of storms, shipwrecks, and underwater monsters haunt the art and literature of coastal societies, serving as warnings to those who might venture into the blue expanse. Yet, across cultures and throughout history, humans have constructed elaborate structures to facilitate the crossing and even occupation of the ocean.

Recent scholarship in the blue humanities has shed light on the profound ways that oceans influence politics, economics, science, and culture. Aquatic environments have conditioned everything from human diets, artistic traditions, trade networks, and settlement patterns. Whereas architects and historians have studied harbours and ports, far fewer have looked at the vessels that traversed and inhabited the open water. These “sea machines” signal the outer limits of a period and place’s techno-environmental imagination. What architectonic skills did designers, shipwrights, and navigators employ in the construction and operation of ocean structures? How did the forms and materials of water-based vessels speak to larger ideological and environmental forces, including those tied to colonization and slavery, capitalism, and the climate? And how might infrastructure linked to offshore extraction (e.g., fishing, pearl farming, coral and deep-sea mining, oil drilling, etc.) provide a specifically architectural way to evaluate the relationship between human and non-human entities across the land and sea divide?

SEA MACHINES brings together members of the Daniels Faculty and a diverse roster of internationally recognized scholars and practitioners with an interest in environmental history, technology, and design. The study of maritime spaces is timely and of wide interest for scholars and practitioners across the design disciplines, especially given the sea’s increasing precarity in the face of climate change. Ultimately, the symposium highlights the central role played by architecture in charting a future environmental and technological reality.

SCHEDULE (10:00am - 4:30pm ET)

INTRODUCTION (10:00am - 10:30am ET)

10:00am - 10:30am Opening Remarks, Christy Anderson and Jason Nguyen

SESSION 1: INFRASTRUCTURE (10:30am - 11:50am ET)

10:30am - 10:50am Keller Easterling, "ISO 1161"

10:50am - 11:10am Carola Hein, "Oil on Water: The Global Petroleumscape and the Urbanization of the Sea"

11:10am - 11:30am Prita Meier, "Below the Waterline: Dhows and the Politics of Heritage in the African Indian Ocean"

11:30am - 11:50am Discussion

SESSION 2: CULTURE (1:00pm - 2:20pm ET)

1:00pm - 1:20pm Niklas Maak, "Phalansteries at Sea: Fourier, Le Corbusier, and the Architecture of the Cruiseship"

1:20pm - 1:40pm Meredith Martin and Gillian Weiss, "Sun King at Sea"

1:40pm - 2:00pm Elliott Sturtevant, "Traveling the Heat Line: The 'Great White Fleet' as Climatic Media"

2:00pm - 2:20pm Discussion

SESSION 3: ENERGY (2:30pm - 3:50pm ET)

2:30pm - 2:50pm Sara Rich, "Naufragic Architecture in the Anthropocene"

2:50pm - 3:10pm Margaret Schotte, "Water vs. Wood: Desalination Machines and the Shipboard Space, c. 1695"

3:10pm - 3:30pm Larrie Ferreiro, "The Evolution of the Naval Architect, 1600-2000"

3:30pm - 3:50pm Discussion

4:00pm - 4:30pm Closing Remarks, Christy Anderson and Jason Nguyen

The event is free and open to the public. For more information on the symposium and its speakers, including registration and Zoom information, please see <http://seamachines.org>.

Reference:

CONF: Sea Machines (online, 4 Feb 22). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 18, 2022 (accessed Jul 13, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/35720>>.