

Art and Conflict in Times of Climate Change (Berlin, 17–18 Jul 25)

Forum Transregionale Studien, Wallotstraße 14, 14193 Berlin, Jul 17–18, 2025

Feng Schöneweiß

Climate change has happened more than once in the histories of planet Earth and those of human beings. Notably more recent, and historically documented, occurrences include the so-called Medieval Climate Anomaly (ca. 950–1250 CE), the Little Ice Age (ca. 1300–1850) and indeed the contemporary Anthropogenic climate crisis in times of the Anthropocene. From the Russian famine at the beginning of the 17th century following severe winters triggered by volcanic eruptions in Peru, to severe flooding in Kenya, Tanzania and Burundi displacing almost a million people, such climatic shifts have affected and are affecting enormous numbers of people around the planet.

Unsurprisingly, endemic to the periods of climate changes are conflicts. These conflicts drastically affect human lives, thus we find both conflicts and the climatic shifts that precipitated them reflected in and entangled with cultural productions. One example is the paintings created by Dutch masters of people ice-skating and revelling on frozen rivers and enjoying the curious prosperity brought by conflict with Spain. Another is from Song-dynasty China: Facing deforestation and military conflicts with northern Jurchen powers, metropolitan regions of the Song increasingly shifted from firewood to coal as energy source, which correlated with producing some of the finest porcelain glazes in Chinese history. These historical instances resonate strongly with the contemporary music of Syrian activists, who are grappling with the effects of drought and Civil war. In multifaceted ways, the making of arts, broadly defined as the cultural expression of human lived experience, has been entangled with both the violent forces of climatic change, conflicts, and crises.

To examine the complex connections and correlations between art and conflict in times of climate change, this workshop focuses on (1) how cultures have been shaped by the concurrent forces of war and changing environments, and (2) how these lived experiences are expressed through art and literature. Researchers will contribute works-in-progress across disciplinary boundaries, including anthropology, art and cultural history, environmental and digital humanities, post-colonial literature, besides film and media studies. Taking a necessarily planetary perspective, the workshop will interrogate and explore artistic creation and armed conflicts in historical and contemporary climate changes, and will explore pertinent and indeed timely topics across historical and geographical boundaries. Our core questions include:

- How was/is artistic creation, and cultural expression in general, conditioned and/or oriented by non-human beings and beyond-human factors, such as deforestation, ocean currents, monsoon, El Niño, orbital forcing, and volcanic activities?

- How have these factors been represented, and what are the complexities of representing and recording such profound cultural memories?
- How were/are violence and environmental disruption intertwined within cultural memories, and constituted in material, oral, visual and textual cultures?
- What methodologies could contemporary researchers use and develop to address the aforementioned questions from interdisciplinary perspectives?
- How could formats of interdisciplinary collaboration, such as this workshop, enhance academic research on common questions, further knowledge transfer across sectors, and enable actions for positive changes?

Program

Day 1: Thursday, 17 July 2025

9:30 Welcome Address by Georges Khalil (Forum Transregionale Studien) and Hannah Baader (4A_Lab / Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut)

9:50 Welcome of Critical Friends by Feng Schöneweiß, 4A_Lab

10:00 Concept Note by T Pritchard, The University of Edinburgh

10:20 Keynote by Katrin Kleemann, German Maritime Museum – Leibniz Institute for Maritime History

Climate History Perspectives: Echoes of Conflict and Culture

10:40 Discussion

11:00–11:30 Coffee Break

11:30–12:30 Panel 1: Extraction, Transition, and Repair

Rebecca Macklin, University of Aberdeen

Visualising Relations in the Tar Sands: Extraction, Aesthetics, and Repair

Emily McGiffin, The University of Warwick

“God has riches, I have cows”: Field Notes on Cultural Heritage in the Bauxite Zone

Chair: T Pritchard, The University of Edinburgh

12:30–13:30 Lunch

13:30–14:30 Panel 2: Anthropologies of Collaboration and Conflicts

Antonio Montañes Jimenez, University of Oxford

Scarcity, Family Memories, and Conflict: Methodological Notes and Collaborative Insights

Freya Hope, University of Oxford

Anarchy, Art and Alternative Worldmaking: New Travellers’ Historicity of Resistance

Chair: Christopher Williams-Wynn, Freie Universität Berlin

14:30–15:00 Coffee Break

15:00–16:30 Film Screening and Discussion (hybrid)

Matthias De Groof, University of Antwerp / University of Amsterdam

Discussants: Antonio Montañes Jimenez, Rebecca Macklin, Emily McGiffin (chair), Feng Schöneweiß

16:30–17:00 Coffee Break

17:00–18:30 Lecture (hybrid)

Sugata Ray, UC Berkeley

Das Paradies: The Anthropocene Extinction in the Early Modern World

Chair: Hannah Baader, 4A_Lab / KHI

Day 2: Friday 18 July 2025

9:30–11:00 Panel 3: Climate and the Arts of Change

Tenaya Jorgensen, Trinity College Dublin

Climatic Stress and Political Fragmentation: Environmental 'Pull Factors' in Viking Raiding Strategies in Ninth-Century Francia

Feng Schöneweiß, 4A_Lab

Celadon Aesthetics, Gunpowder, and Energy Transition in Song-dynasty China

T Pritchard, The University of Edinburgh

"As if the world should straight be turn'd to ashes": Comprehending Climate Change and Conflict in the Early 17th Century

Chair: Parul Singh, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

11:00–11:30 Coffee Break

11:30–12:30 Panel 4: Resilience and Memories (hybrid)

Ammar Azzouz, University of Oxford

A Revolution of Art

Rebecca Hanna John, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte

Preservation and Extinction: On the Entanglement of Ecological and Decolonial Perspectives in Jumana Manna's Artistic Practice

Chair: Mahroo Moosavi, 4A_Lab

12:30–13:30 Lunch

13:30–15:00 Roundtable Discussion

Chair: Hannah Baader

Concluding Remarks by Emily McGiffin and Feng Schöneweiß

We cordially invite you to register for online participation of the lecture by Sugata Ray. Owing to the seat limit in the workshop room, in-person participation has already been fully booked. We kindly ask for your understanding and look forward to welcoming you via Zoom!

Please register at the following link:

https://eu02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/hATn7E_EQoKtYqALyXXwbQ#/registration

Sugata Ray

Das Paradies: The Anthropocene Extinction in the Early Modern World

Thursday 17 July 2025, 17:00 CEST

Taking Roelant Savery's Das Paradies (1626) as a starting point, this talk explores the role of West-

ern European artistic cultures and collecting practices in inciting the ecocide of the post-1492 Anthropocene Extinction. In particular, Sugata Ray explores how Savery's celebrated painting of Adam and Eve consuming the forbidden fruit amidst a verdant landscape inhabited by animals such as the now-extinct dodo, endemic to the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, became foundational for scientific and cultural perceptions of the extinction of nonhuman life in colonial worlds.

<https://www.khi.fi.it/en/aktuelles/veranstaltungen/2025/07/das-paradies-the-anthropocene-extinction-in-the-early-modern-world.php>

Interdisciplinary Workshop

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Organizers:

Emily McGiffin (University of Warwick), Feng Schöneweiß (4A_Lab, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut), T Pritchard (The University of Edinburgh), Antonio Montañes Jimenez (University of Oxford), and 4A_Lab

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Reference:

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