

More-Than-Human Agencies and the Histories of Photography (Venice, 28 Oct 25)

Palazzo Malcanton Marcorà, Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Noemi Quagliati

"A Sensitive Matter: More-Than-Human Agencies and the Histories of Photography" – Symposium organised by Cristina Baldacci and Noemi Quagliati (DFBC and NICHE, Ca' Foscari University of Venice).

In recent years, scholars have begun to reframe the history of photography shifting focus from a linear account of styles, technological innovations, and documentary practices to a (plural) material history that examines the medium's entanglements with subterranean resources, animal and plant derivatives, and chemical pollutants – all situated within broader systems of capitalist development. Research into the 'environment of photography' reveals the industry's deep ties to systems of imperial expansion, extractive labour practices, and environmental harm.

This symposium seeks to take stock of these emerging approaches in photographic studies by exploring how environmental questions reshape both the history and the theory of the medium. It invites contributions that consider not only how photography has depicted, studied, and polluted the more-than-human world, but also how ecological conditions, material constraints, and non-human agencies have influenced photographic practices, aesthetics, and discourses. The goal is to examine photography as a site where environmental histories and visual cultures intersect, generating new critical frameworks for understanding the medium.

The one-day symposium is part of the Art Ecologies series, within the research activities of the Ecological Art Practices cluster at the NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE). It will feature presentations by researchers, practitioners, and curators.

Confirmed speakers include Siobhan Angus (Carleton University, Ottawa), author of "Camera Geologica: An Elemental History of Photography"; Katerina Korola (University of Minnesota/eikones-University of Basel), currently developing the project "Heliotropic Media: Botanical Experiments in Photography"; Daniel Borselli (University of Florence), author of "Realismo catastrofista. Estetica, etica e politica della fotografia nell'Antropocene"; Francesca Fabiani (ICCD-Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome), head of contemporary photography projects and international relations; Giuseppe Ferrari, co-founder with Nicoletta Traversa of RI-PRESE Memory Keepers, a Venetian home movie archive that explores the deterioration of images caused by high tides and the climate crisis; and Matteo de Mayda, an artist-photographer whose work engages with social and environmental issues, using a combination of documentary, archival, and scientific visual material.

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PROGRAMME

(Biral Room, 4th floor, Palazzo Malcanton Marcorà, Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

OCTOBER 28, 2025

10:00-10:15 – Cristina Baldacci and Noemi Quagliati (DFBC and NICHE, Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Welcome and Introduction

10:15-11:00 – Siobhan Angus (Carleton University, Ottawa)

Atmospheric Exposures: Mining, Pollution, and the Platinum Print

11:00-11:45 – Katerina Korola (University of Minnesota / eikones - University of Basel)

Intimate Exposures: Botanical Impressions from the Loheland School

11:45–12:30 – Daniel Borselli (University of Florence)

The Rise and Fall of Spaceship Earth: Unthinking the 'Manthropocene' in and through Nonhuman Photography

12:30-13:00 – Discussion

13:00-14:15 – Lunch

14:15-15:00 – Francesca Fabiani (ICCD-Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome)

Joan Fontcuberta: Culture of Dust. The Adventurous Life of Photography

15:00-15:45 – Giuseppe Ferrari (RI-PRESE Memory Keepers, Venice)

Watermarks on Memory

15:45-16:30 – Matteo de Mayda (artist-photographer, Venice)

Ecologies of Seeing: On the Responsibility of Representation

16:30-17:00 – Discussion and Conclusion

Reference:

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