Art Matters: Art, AI, Sustainability (Freiburg, 6-7 Oct 26)

Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), Albertstraße 19, 79104 Freiburg, Oct 6–07, 2026

Sarah Hegenbart, TUM

ART MATTERS is an artistic research event that critically examines the intersections of AI, sustainability, aesthetics and ethics.
Through a postdigital lens, the event questions the entanglement of digital and physical realms, emphasizing that AI is not separate from material reality but deeply rooted in it. Rather than abandoning digitality, we aim to interrogate it from within – bringing together perspectives from artistic practice, academic research, and cultural institutions.

Digital technologies – especially Artificial Intelligence – are often framed as immaterial and abstract. However, their deployment depends heavily on natural and human resources such as silicon, copper, lithium, water, and energy. This project challenges the prevailing perception of AI as "immaterial" by investigating the material foundations, extractive processes, and value chains upon which it relies. Rather than a history of production, current developments in art should be read as one of the consumption of planetary resources.

Art has the potential to both obscure and expose these material underpinnings. On the one hand, artistic production depends on its own infrastructures and resource consumption; on the other hand, art possesses a unique aesthetic capacity to make audiences aware of the contradictions and implications of technological progress. In this sense, the Art Matters project acts not only as cultural expression, but as a material practice embedded in economic, ethical, legal and ecological networks.

Programme:
Tuesday, 6 October: Welcome and Introduction | Performance | Keynote
16:00 Opening, Reception (KG I, 1015)

17:00-18:00 Performance Lecture (KG I, 1015)
The Performance That Never Happened: AI, Migration and the Politics of Storytelling
Kene Igweonu (University of Brighton)

18:15-19:30 Keynote and Discussion (KG I, 1015)
From Traditions to Algorithms: Indigenous Perspectives on Data Sovereignty in the Age of Generative AI
Coppélie Cocq (Ubmejen Universitiähta)

Wednesday, 7 October Workshop "Aesthetics of Extraction (AoE)" | Visual and sound installation |

Resonant Roots-walk | String quartet: Concert GREEN NOISE

8:30-18:00 Workshop “Aesthetics of Extraction” (FRIAS seminar room)
8:30-9:00 Arrival
9:00-9:30 Kick-Off and Introduction
9:30-11:45 Section 1: Material and Extractivist Realities of AI (Chair: Leonie Reins)

Speakers:

Transnational “AI Colonialism” and Ecological AI. Can the EU Ensure a More Just and Environmentally Responsible AI Future?
(Constanza Di Francesco Maesa)

Rethinking Sustainability beyond the Human: AI and Interspecies Justice
(Leonie N. Bossert)

Decomposing Seamlessness: Crowds, Clickwork, and the AI-Leviathan
(Boris Čučković Berger)

11:15-11:45 Coffee and drinks

11:45-13:30 Section 2: The Concept of Freedom in Art and Aesthetics (Chair: Oliver Müller)

Speakers:

Ars Ex Machina: Ethics and Aesthetics in the Age of Generative AI
(David J. Gunkel)

Museological Autonomy: On the Imperative of Sustainability under AI
(Michael Klipphahn-Karge)

On aesthetic experimentation, transparency and accountability in AI regulation and governance
(Daria Onitiu)

13:30-14:30 Lunch
14:30-16:15 Section 3: Institutions, Infrastructures, and Speculative Futures (Chair: Stephanie von Spreter)

Speakers:

A Few Remarks on the Aesthetics and Ethics of Infrastructure
(Dietrich Erben)

Contesting Anthropomorphic AI Futures in Law: Memory, Metaphor and Metamorphosis
(Stefan Larsson)

Invisible Infrastructures: Art, AI, and the Politics of Democratic Futures
(Sebnem Yardimci Geyikci)
16:15-16:30 Summing up
16:30-18:30 Resonant Roots workshop

18:30-19:30 Dinner at FRIAS (Catering)
20:00-22:00 Concert: FABRIK Quartet “D/RIFT” (Humboldtsaal)

Attendance and Registration

Registration Link: https://eveeno.com/360029416

Upon registration: The Workshop on 7 October is intended for academics and artists with a connection to the subject.

Open to Public: The Performance Lecture and Keynote on 6 October as well as the Concert on 7 October are open to a broader audience. No registration is required for these events.

https://uni-freiburg.de/frias/art-matters/#Full-Programme

Reference:
CONF: Art Matters: Art, AI, Sustainability (Freiburg, 6-7 Oct 26). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 16, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54292>.