

Centre for the GeoHumanities

GeoHumanities Newsletter No. 15
Royal Holloway, University of London
royalholloway.ac.uk/geohumanities
May 2025

ISSN 978-0-9568607-7-4 | © RHUL 2015
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Centre for the GeoHumanities

Welcome to the fifteenth edition of the [Centre for the GeoHumanities](https://royalholloway.ac.uk/geohumanities) newsletter. Please get in touch with us at geohumanities@rhul.ac.uk if you have news you would like to share or would like your work featured.

8th Cosgrove Lecture

Siobhan Angus (Carleton University)

Camera geologica: photography and the art of resource extraction

Monday 12th May 2025

5:30pm, Queens Lecture Theatre

Free entry. To book your place, please go to the [Royal Holloway booking page](#)



Carleton Watkins, Malakoff Diggins, Nevada County, California. 1871. Albumen print.
The Bancroft Library. University of California, Berkeley

Siobhan's lecture will focus on Jonas NT Becker's "Better or Equal Use" series, which documents former coal mining sites in Appalachia redeveloped under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA). Becker prints his photographs using coal collected from the sites he documents, forging a connection between the mined material, the history it represents, and the photographs themselves. Becker's labor-intensive prints offer an entry point for exploring the

relationship between aesthetics and extraction, with particular attention to the afterlives of mining. Accordingly, Siobhan will explore the geological history of photography by analysing the materiality of Becker's carbon prints, with a focus on coal and gelatin.

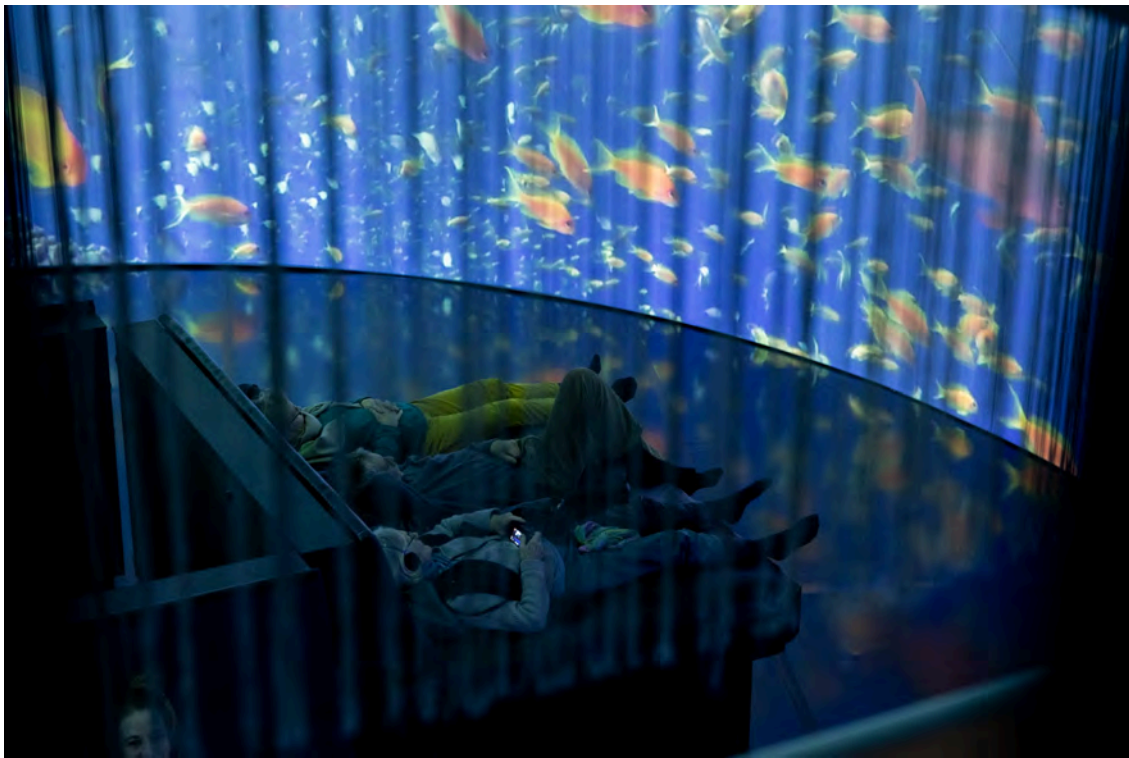
Siobhan Angus works at the intersections of art history, media studies, and the environmental humanities. Her current research explores the visual culture of resource extraction with a focus on materiality, labor, and environmental justice. Angus is an assistant professor of media studies at Carleton University. She is the author of *Camera Geologica: An Elemental History of Photography* (Duke University Press 2024) which was awarded the 2024 Photography Network Book Prize and her research has been published in *Environmental Humanities*, *liquid blackness*, and *October*.

This lecture will be in person. It will be recorded for subsequent podcast.

Research Highlights

Oceanic Refractions

At the Venice Biennale



We are delighted to announce that [Oceanic Refractions](#), a project emerging from [Amer Kanngieser](#)'s Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship at Royal Holloway, in collaboration with Mere Nailatikau (Fiji), Laisiasa Dave Lavaki and Tumeli Tuqota (Fiji), and Joseph Kamaru (Kenya), has been selected for the Curators Pavilion at the 2025 Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2025. The immersive installation will be shown in L'Arsenale from May to November. This is the first time Fijian-based artists will be represented in the history of the Biennale. It's an ambitious and deeply meaningful event for the team.

The Oceanic Refractions project grows out of a longstanding collaboration which began in 2018 with an audio storytelling class at the University of South Pacific's Oceania Center in Suva, Fiji, and has involved a series of community arts workshops, creative practices and writing that centres Indigenous Pacific storytelling in climate art and communication. It was first commissioned to launch in Berlin last year, and then as part of the Fiji delegation to the Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture in Hawai'i. A new modular edition will be shown in Venice.

Recent coverage:

Oceanic Refractions: Reconnecting through sound and story

[National Indigenous Times](#) (Feb 2025)

Oceanic Ontologies: Taloi Havini, Amer Kanngieser and Mere

Nailatikau, with Federica Zabaletti

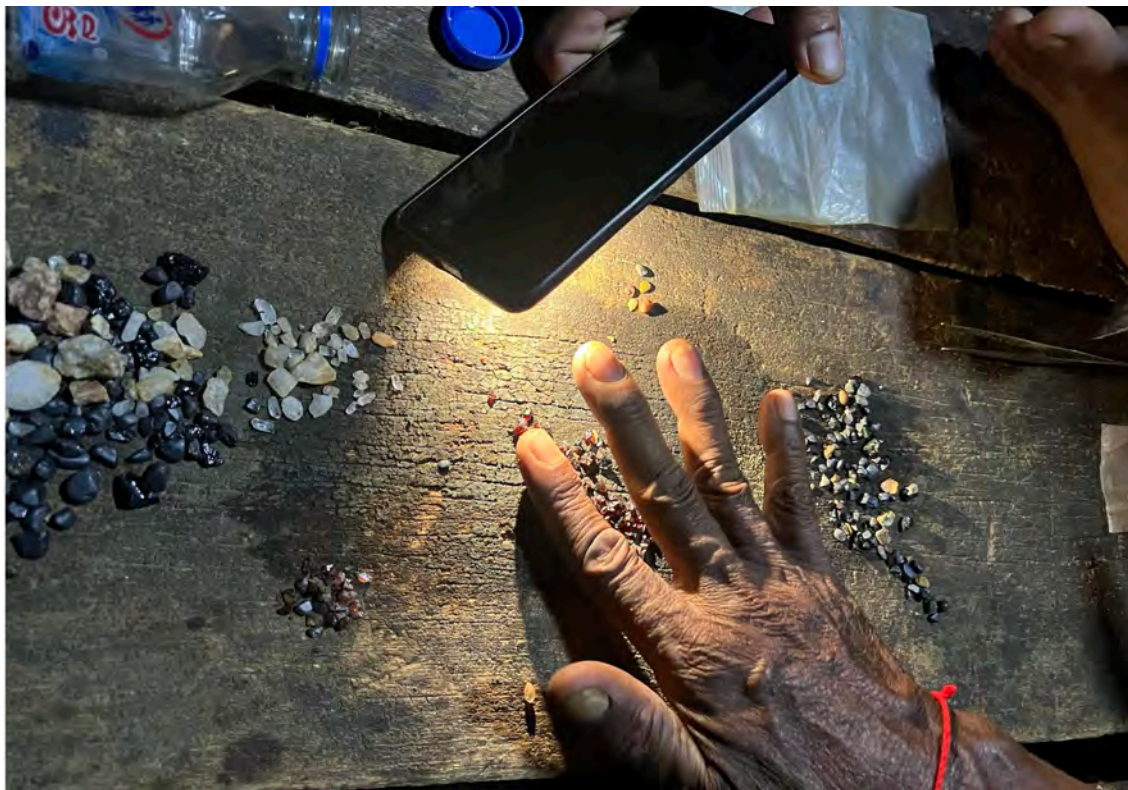
[KoozArch Conversation](#) (Sept 2024)

Telling Truths During the Climate Crisis: Reflections on Oceanic Refractions featuring conversation with AM Kanngieser and Mere Nailatikau (By Emele Ugavule)

[transmedial Journal](#) (Dec 2024)

Think Deep: Imagine?

Reimagining artisanal mining through creative practice



Think Deep: Imagine? is a year-long 'follow-on' project from a five-year ERC-funded project led by [Harriet Hawkins](#), building on existing collaborations between UK and Khmer researchers, artists and curators, and artisanal gem mining communities working in Cambodia's North-west borderlands.

The project takes as its start point the reflection that 'the exhibition cannot be made' which emerged during discussions of the exhibition that was being planned as the culmination of three years of collaborative research for [Think Deep](#). In discussion with miners, we had planned a research exhibition of artwork, research findings and

artefacts, celebrating their practices, for display both in Cambodia and online. Cambodia has a rich history of gemstone mining, but its geopolitical complexities combined with the widespread global dismissal of artisanal miners as unskilled, socially deviant victims of poverty and as environmental pariahs, has led to a delegitimation of miners' livelihoods. As such, mining communities and NGOs have recently called for support to help raise the profile of miners' practices and lives, in helping them navigate what have been predicted as 'bleak futures.' Changing contexts however, mean that 'surfacing' the miners' lives and skills has become increasingly inappropriate – 'the exhibition cannot be made.'

Think Deep: Imagine? will continue the collaborative work developed by the original Think Deep team. It will do so through an exploration of the concept of 'research aesthetics' and the form of the 'research exhibition'. We will consider how/if creative practices might be part of a collaborative, community-led desire to respect the need for mining practices to remain hidden and elusive, whilst also 'surfacing' these practices as part of miners' requests for collaborative action to help legitimate their livelihoods.

Hidden Sand

An Interdisciplinary Research Project



Sand mining operation, Kampot Province, Cambodia

Researchers at Royal Holloway, including Will Jamieson and Laurie Parsons, are partners in [Hidden Sand](#), a innovative new research project examining the socio-environmental impact of the global sand trade funded under UKRI's new Interdisciplinary Research programme. Led by the University of Southampton in collaboration with Royal Holloway's Department of Geography, with partners including the World Wide Fund for Nature and Cambodia-based photographer Miguel Jerónimo, the project brings together expertise from river sciences, engineering, geohumanities, practice-based art, and digital methodologies to develop a innovative way of undertaking interdisciplinary research within a novel 'Digital Twin' environment.

As regular readers of this Newsletter will know, [Will Jamieson](#) has made the cultural and economic geographies of sand his special subject. In 2020 he published 'A Thirst for Sand', a work of creative fiction on the subject of land reclamation in Singapore, as part of his Techne-funded PhD at Royal Holloway and continued his concern with extraction in his work as postdoctoral research fellow on the Centre's [Think Deep](#) project. He continues to publish widely on granular geographies,

environmental engineering and planetary urbanisation including an essay in the critical arts journal *E-flux* on [Extracting sovereignty](#) (2023).

The Hidden Sand project will focus on the Cambodian Mekong, one of the world's most ecologically important, yet intensively sand-mined rivers in the world, drawing particularly on the expertise of Laurie Parsons in Royal Holloway's [Geopolitics, Development, Security and Justice Group](#). Amongst questions to be addressed are the impacts of sand mining on physical and ecological river functioning and on local communities notably in the context of potential labour rights abuses and displacement of local populations.

CoastARTS

Shaping Resilience through Transnational Performance-based Arts



An Fear Liath, written by Philip Doherty and adapted by Fran Nuñez. Galway International Festival 2024. Photo: Bruno Pierrucci.

[Helen Gilbert](#), Professor of Environmental Arts at Royal Holloway, is leading a new three-year project on coastlines as zones of ecocultural crisis. Funded by AHRC in collaboration with research councils in Norway, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain, the project treats the coastal areas of Europe and its former colonies as rich zones for analysing the

convergence of ecological and cultural perspectives on crisis and its material manifestations. [CoastARTS](#) uses performing arts practice and research to develop methods and models that can be deployed across multiple disciplines to deepen understanding of the intricate links between historical crises and looming threats to our planet. In doing so, it seeks to lay ground for building resilience in communities and fostering adaptive responses to the Earth's increasing precarity.

The archival and practice-led research at the heart of CoastARTS will explore transhistorical, cross-cultural and transregional connections to better understand what is life-giving in human and multispecies communities. A key aim is to retrieve neglected and forgotten ecological knowledge from Indigenous and other marginalised communities. Working with museums, festivals, arts centres, and theatre-makers, Helen's research team will develop exciting new approaches to understanding how coasts act, and interact, as zones of crisis in both iconic and material terms.

Citizen of the World:

A Senior Research Fellowship



[Innes Keighren](#) has been awarded the Donald Winch Fund Fellowship in Intellectual History by the British Academy for 2025/26 to bring to completion more than a dozen years of research on the remarkable, but largely unknown, life of William Macintosh. Macintosh was, at turns, a colonial legislator, world traveller, prisoner of war, best-selling author, papal advisor, counterrevolutionary spy, and self-proclaimed citizen of the world. His work was read by Thomas Jefferson and Adam Smith, he corresponded with Joseph Banks and George Washington, and dined with Aaron Burr and the Princesse de Talleyrand. Yet, today, he is almost entirely unknown. Drawing on an unstudied archive of Macintosh's personal papers, hidden in a wardrobe in Avignon and seized at the height of the French Revolution, Innes's research promises a fascinating insight into Macintosh's forgotten life and why it still matters. The Fellowship project, 'Citizen of the World: The Global Lives of William Macintosh 1737-1813', will facilitate periods of archival research in Avignon and Rome and the completion of a monograph for McGill-Queen's University Press. For more on the wider project, see [Innes's blog](#).

Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships



**Arts and
Humanities
Research Council**

The Centre is pleased to announce two new AHRC doctoral partnership awards for exciting PhD research projects in collaboration with national museums, starting in autumn 2025.

The first AHRC award is with the Science Museum Group, a longstanding partner of the Centre. The project is entitled "Mapping the seafloor: GLORIA and the emergence of a Cold War planetary imagination, 1965-2002". It will be undertaken by Erica Deluchi, and supervised by [Rachael Squire](#) and [Veronica Della Dora](#), building on their expertise on oceanography and the planetary imagination.

The second AHRC award is with the Victoria & Albert Museum and Kew Gardens, bringing together two institutions which have worked with

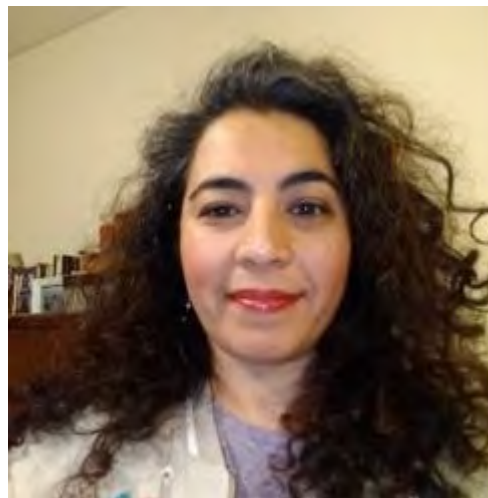
Centre researchers on a range of humanities research projects. The project is entitled “Plants and their products: biocultural collections at Kew Gardens and the South Kensington Museum during the long nineteenth century”. Recruitment is by [advertisement](#), and the student appointed will be supervised by [Felix Driver](#) and [Caroline Cornish](#) in collaboration with Simona Valeriani at the V&A.

These projects, like all Collaborative Studentships, will be co-supervised between a university and external partners. It is worth reflecting on the wider benefits of this form of PhD funding which has been championed by the Centre for GeoHumanities. Since 2001, the Department of Geography at Royal Holloway has been awarded a total of 49 UKRI Collaborative Studentships, the majority from AHRC, together representing around £4m in research funding. Many of these students have gone on to careers in the culture and heritage sector.

Centre for GeoHumanities Visitors 2024-25



Throughout the year, the Centre is pleased to host a number of visiting scholars from around the world, fostering new and existing partnerships and supporting exchange between academics and practitioners.



Dr Débora Swistun

Dr Débora Swistun is visiting the Centre from April to November 2025. She is a Lecturer in Environmental Humanities at the National University of Avellaneda (UNDAV) and member of the Argentine Scientific and Technological Research Council (CONICET) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She is the recipient of a British Academy Visiting Fellowship, in collaboration with Sasha Engelmann in the Centre for GeoHumanities, for a collaborative project for sensing air under the title 'Environmental suffering and petrochemical legacies'. This will involve working with colleagues at Royal Holloway to test air sensing tools performance and practices; examining UK-Argentina colonial relations

and their relevance for contemporary environmental management; and honing arts and humanities approaches for engaging audiences with air quality and narratives of environmental suffering. Following last year's British Academy award supporting the visit of Dr Mariana Lamego (from UERJ in Rio de Janeiro), this new Fellowship supports a key strategic objective of the Centre to foster research collaborations and extend our global geohumanities network through partnerships with scholars and institutions in South America.

Débora's project will situate the gathering of air quality data in the context of increasing calls within the global academy for *ciencia digna* (dignified science), involving respectful and critical uses of environmental data in the interests of underserved communities. The Fellowship builds on three years of collaboration with Sasha, involving the co-design and piloting of an air quality project called Sensora with members of the community of Villa Inflamable (Flammable), located close to the centre of Buenos Aires on the edge of the largest petrochemical facility in Argentina. It will involve collaborations with geographers, artists and earth scientists as well as new research in the colonial archives concerning UK-Argentina relations. Look out for further news of Débora's visit and related events in the spring and summer!



Dr Muren Zhang, Associate Professor in English literature at East China Normal University, Shanghai, is visiting for the academic year 2024-5.

While she originally planned to be writing on the English countryside, the experience of working at the Centre has opened up new avenues for enquiry. As she writes, "In the first couple of months of my visit, through conversations with colleagues at the Centre, I revised a Chinese article reflecting on the development of landscape studies in the UK. The piece brings concerns with affect, mobility, and embodiment in geography into conversation with debates in literary criticism around the shift from paranoid reading to reparative approaches. The conceptual framework of paranoia and reparation, drawn from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, has been a consistent thread in my research. In the months that followed, I completed an English-Chinese translation of Sedgwick's early book *Between Men*. The work of translation itself felt like a form of movement, shaped by both paranoid and reparative impulses, Sedgwick's affectively charged prose requiring constant negotiation between interpreting what lies beneath the surface and staying close to the texture and rhythm of her language."

She continues: "At the moment I am working on an article about "unfeeling", which brings together landscape criticism and affect theory. It examines the ways unfeeling can disrupt the affective structures of dominant landscape discourse and gesture toward alternative attachments, through close readings of how fictional characters move through and relate to landscape. Just as important to me as the writing, over the past few months I have been walking, mapping the area around the Royal Holloway campus on foot. These walks, whether solitary or with company, purposeful or aimless, have led me to parts of town I wouldn't otherwise have noticed, including several Lego figures tucked away in unexpected corners...."



Examples of Yinlan's work inspired by the British Museum's collection of Song Dynasty porcelain

Dr Yinlan Xu, Associate Professor in Art and Design, Nanjing Institute of Technology, is also visiting for the academic year 2024-5. She has participated in the teaching and research programmes of the Department, including the museums & collections and a visit to our partners at Kew Gardens, focusing on areas of culture and heritage. She is using the visit to focus on her writing in both Chinese and English, including a study of tangible and intangible cultural heritage through artistic engagement with museum objects. In particular she has engaged with artefacts from the Sir Percival David collection of Chinese porcelain in the British Museum through a highly distinctive form of creative practice - that of traditional Chinese flower arranging, in which she is an expert. She also contributed examples of her work to Royal Holloway's International Culture Festival in November.

Dr Ekaterina Gladkova (Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Northumbria) presented a workshop in the Landscape Surgery series in November 2025 on creative practice interventions into industrial meat production using a geospatial augmented reality art intervention in the form of a giant female pig designed to re-imagine the geographies of pork production in the UK.

The Centre also continues to host international students, including PhD students undertaking visits as part of partnerships with Universities in Brazil, Italy, Switzerland, and South Korea. Visitors in 2025 include:

Federica Manna (University of Padua), visiting from June to September 2025 in support of her PhD research on University Museums as part of a wider project on 'Padua, City of Science' (working with Veronica della Dora and Felix Driver).

Isadora Bevilaqua (State University of Rio de Janeiro), visiting from September to December 2025 in support of her PhD research on visual archives of nature at the Rio de Janeiro Botanical Gardens (working with Felix Driver).

Helder Monteiro Pelegrino (University of São Paulo), visiting in July 2025 to undertake a study of nineteenth-century explorer Richard Burton (working with Innes Keighren).

Felipe Vieira (State University of Rio de Janeiro) visited the Centre for four months to December 2024 in support of his doctoral research on histories of Brazilian geography and film-making. Like all our PhD student visitors, he was a regular participant in the fortnightly Landscape Surgery series.

Camila Medina Novoa (ETH Zurich) who visited us for six months until January 2025, in support of her doctoral research on the global circulation of *Araucaria araucana*, the monkey puzzle tree. She was delighted to find a striking specimen on the Royal Holloway campus!



Botany Laboratory, Royal Holloway c.1896 (Royal Holloway Archives). Note the Monkey Puzzle specimen in the foreground. A tree planted in the grounds outside Founders Building was studied by visiting researcher Camila Medina Novoa as part of her PhD research.

Recent Events

**Making a Difference? Witness Workshops
on the Environmental Movement, 1970-
2020**

this year. The OHEM team have organised further witness workshops devoted to the politics of the environmental sector in [Northern Ireland](#); the creative arts of activism (with a particular focus on [music](#)); and environmental projects and policies in [Wales](#), held in Cardiff to mark ten years of the [Future Generations Act](#). The final OHEM workshop on environmental movements in Scotland will take place next month in Glasgow where the OHEM team are also involved in convening a session at the 2025 [Oral History Society conference](#), themed around the question, Whose voices?

Historical Geographies of Environmentalism

ORGANISATIONS AND YOUTH

50 MILLION VOLUNTEERS

DOCUMENTS VISION
U.K. / P 72/551/2
Copy A



Voluntary Organisations & Youth in the Environment: one of four reports commissioned by the UK's Department of Environment for the UN Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, June 1972. Photo courtesy of David Matless

The OHEM project was also involved in supporting a series of five seminars on the histories and geographies of the environmental movement within the Spring 2025 [London Group of Historical Geographers](#) series at the Institute of Historical Research.

The speakers included Julian Agyeman (Tufts University), co-founder of the Black Environment Network in 1988; Jenny Pickerill (Sheffield), researcher on contemporary environmental activism and contributor to Steve McQueen's book [Resistance](#); David Matless (Nottingham), author of [England's Green](#), a new book about English nature and culture since the 1960s; Paul Merchant (British Library), historical geographer turned oral historian working for National Life Stories; and the Centre's Toby Butler, the OHEM project lead, in discussion with Mary Stewart, head of National Life Stories and a partner on the project.

More-Than-Human Mappings



The latest event from [Living Maps](#), the network that uses participatory mapping to encourage community engagement and social change, took place on 24-25 April in London. It was dedicated to the subject of More-than-Human-Mappings, and attracted a large audience of academics, artists and practitioners from a wide variety of fields. The event included conference papers, workshops, exhibitions and walking tours. Conference sessions explored more-than-human ways of thinking about maps and of doing mapping; maps of the more-than-human; and embodied processes of mapping that attend to non-representational ideas of liveliness. The key note lecture was presented by Sasha Engelmann on the subject of 'Mapping Planetary Weather.'

For more information about the event, and the other activities of the Living Maps network, whose directors include Toby Butler and Barbara

Brayshay of the Centre for GeoHumanities, visit the [Living Maps website](#).

Upcoming Events

Innes Keighren Inaugural Lecture

6:15PM Tuesday 20th May, Moore Auditorium, Royal Holloway



All are warmly welcome to the inaugural lecture of Professor Innes Keighren. Inaugurals are very special occasions showcasing the work of academics and celebrating their contributions to university life. In this one, Innes will be talking about the restlessly mobile life of the principal protagonist of his current project on William Macintosh (1737–1813), which features in the 'Research Highlights' section of this newsletter. Spanning the Caribbean, South Asia, and Europe, this lecture shows how one life can illuminate a global history.

Attendance is free and will be followed by a drinks reception. To book your place [click here](#)!

Historical geography seminars - Summer 2025



This seminar series co-curated by staff in the Centre continues into the summer term with three enticing seminars, all freely available online and two in person in Bloomsbury.

13 May 2025: **Lamin Manneh** (Institute of Historical Research) Freedom among the mangroves: Liberated African villages in colonial Gambia and the environmental limits of abolitionist settler colonialism, 1816–1869

27 May 2025: **Chris Philo** (Glasgow), **Stuart Elden** (Warwick) & **Felicitas Kübler** (Alpen-Adria-Universität, Klagenfurt) A panel discussion of Adorno and the Antifascist Geographical Imagination (2025) by Chris Philo

10 June 2025: **Robert Suits** (UCL) In pursuit of room temperature: energy, colonialism, and the history of comfort in the United States

To register to attend any of the seminars listed above, [please visit this page](#) on the website of the Institute of Historical Research. **All seminars begin at 5:30pm.**

Members of the Centre are welcome to join the London Group of Historical Geographers' [seminar mailing list](#) to keep up-to-date with its

activities. The convenors of the Group are Felix Driver and Innes Keighren (Royal Holloway), Miles Ogborn (Queen Mary) and Margot Finn (UCL).

At the Turner Contemporary: Environmental Campaigns, Past & Present



On Sunday 4th May, Toby Butler will chair a panel discussion on the history of environmental activism at the [Turner Contemporary](#), in Margate. Other panel members include Fiona Harvey, Fatima Ibrahim and Tom Burke (who was interviewed for the Centre's project on the [Oral History of the Environmental Movement](#) featured above). This event is inspired by environmental campaigns featured in Steve McQueen's photographic exhibition 'Resistance' in the gallery (open until 1 June).

At the British Library



Look out for publicity for two forthcoming events at the British Library co-organised by members of the Centre:

Gardens and Empire Conference, 27-28th June 2025

This is a [hybrid conference](#) is organised jointly by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, English Heritage and the British Library.

The conference coincides with a major new exhibition at the British Library, [Unearthed: The Power of Gardening](#), which explores the transformative, enriching and sometimes radical power of gardening in Britain and how it impacts people, communities and the environment. It is open from 2 May to 10 August 2025.

Voices for change: launch of a new oral history resource, 23rd October 2025

The launch of the oral history archive created by Centre members as part of the Centre's AHRC-funded project on the [Oral History of the Environmental Movement](#) is due to take place at the British Library on the evening of Thursday 23rd October. Further information about the event and programme will be available soon.

You can keep up to date with details of future events organised by members of the Centre by signing up to the [GeoHumanities Forum mailing List](#).



Our Recent PhD Graduates

The Centre is proud to fund and support future scholars, practitioners, and professionals through a range of Studentships (see Research Highlights above for two Studentships currently open for application). We are delighted to share below some of the PhD theses completed in the last two years by student members of the Centre. The links take you to the catalogue entries on Royal Holloway's research information management system. For research topics of current PhD students see the [CGH people page](#). Congratulations to all of our recent graduates!

Stefano Carnelli, [Visualising Intangible Sacred Spaces: The Materialities and Ephemerality of Orthodox Jewish Ritual Enclosures in London](#), 2024

Angela Chan, [Beyond the Cluster: Creative Clusters as an Instrument for Inclusive Innovation](#), 2025

Jihane Dyer, [Staging Fashion, Imagining the City: Fashion Exhibitions and Urban Modernity at the Museum of London and Beyond, 1973-2026](#), 2024

Rhys Gazeres de Baradieux, [From the Street to the Stadium and Back Again? An Analysis of the Neoliberalisation of Skateboarding Following its Inclusion into the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games](#), 2023

Rosie Knowles, [Creative Approaches to the Industrial Therapeutic Landscapes of Port Talbot](#), 2024

Francesca Kubicki, [Collecting a Paper World: Experiment, Commerce, and Plant Fibres for Papermaking at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew](#), 2023

Flora Parrott, [Both without and within: Cave Exploration as a Guide to Knowledge Making](#), 2023

Alice Reynolds, [The financialisation of Purpose Built Student Accommodation: Transforming landscapes of the city, housing, and student lives in Dublin](#), 2024

Kim Walker, [The making of a quinologist: Cinchona, collections, and science in the work of John Eliot Howard \(1807-1883\)](#), 2023

Previous newsletters back to 2016 are archived and available [here](#).



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