

SustainableCities Connect Workshop

November 22, 2024 (Fri)

John Labatt Visual Art Centre, Western University, London ON

Featuring:

A Panel [*Urban Futures: Navigating Environmental Crises in a Rapidly Changing World*]

Artist Talks [*Creative Synergies: Reimagining Urban Spaces for a Sustainable Future*]

Creative Exhibition [*Sustainable Cities: A Collective Eclipsing*]

Workshop Rundown:

9:00 – 9:30 am	VAC100	Check-in and coffee
9:30 – 11:00 am	VAC100	Panel speaker talks
11:00 – 12:00 pm	VAC100	Moderated Q&A and discussion
12:00 – 1:30 pm	Artlab Gallery	Networking lunch & exhibition visit <i>An environmental play titled Rudbeckia will be performed live at the gallery at 1pm.</i>
1:30 – 3:00 pm	Artlab Gallery	Artist talks
3:00 – 3:15 pm	Artlab Gallery	Coffee break
3:15 – 3:45 pm	Artlab Gallery	Roundtable discussion
3:45 – 4:00 pm	Artlab Gallery	Closing remarks
5:00 – 7:00 pm	Artlab Gallery	Opening reception

Foreword

SustainableCities Connect Workshop is an interdisciplinary project looking to bring together a diverse team of researchers, practitioners, artists, and local experts to consider the intersection of art, urbanization, and sustainability through creative avenues. As the urban population continues to expand, it is critical to enact proactive strategies for equitable and sustainable urban developments. This requires a broader perception urging not just a passive response to existing conditions, especially amidst today's climate change, but an active and intentional effort to shape positive changes and make better places. Such a perception demands a shift from seeing the environment as a mere setting for us to recognizing it as an integral part of human existence, continuously intertwined and inseparable from us. This project features a workshop and a creative exhibition, offering an opportunity to foreground the everyday interconnectedness between humans and their environments through singular or manifold aesthetic interventions.

The creative exhibition invites collaboration between artists, scientists and engineers to explore the material agency of paint, of rock, or of climatic data. By featuring variety of solar-powered artworks, mineral paintings, projection, performance, and 3-D printed sculpture, the exhibition foregrounds interdisciplinarity in the exploration of making, parsing through how the agency of the Earth can be woven through the production of art, infrastructure and data. Attendees from various backgrounds can learn how art can inform their own research and practice. Additionally, the exhibition presents an environmental play centered on *Rudbeckia*, a native flower, which serves as a narrative anchor, provoking philosophical and ecological reflections on the human-environment relationship.

The workshop will be an engaging continuation where the focus on artistic expression takes a deeper dive into its role in urban contexts. Building on the momentum of interdisciplinary dialogue initiated through the creative exhibition, this workshop aims to further these connections by inviting international academic and policy leaders to engage in discussions about the role of creativity in vitalizing sustainable thought and aspiring impactful solutions, fostering institutional and interdisciplinary collaborations. Together, the group can expand on the connections—how we are connected to others, the planet, and the cosmos at large. Following these, alternative discursive, visual, and sensual strategies that go beyond the confines of scientific objectivity, political moralism, or psychological depression may emerge as new possibilities for creativity, collaboration, and holistic approaches to address the complex challenges of urban sustainability.

Panel Speakers

Benjamin Gianni

Associate Professor, Azrieli School of Architecture & Urbanism,
Carleton University

Benjamin Gianni is an Associate Professor in the Azrieli School of Architecture & Urbanism at Carleton University where he leads the Urbanism program. Prof. Gianni received a B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania and an M.Arch. from Yale University. He served as Director of the School of Architecture at Carleton University from 1992-2000 and Director of the School of Information Technology from 2003-2006. Professor Gianni also holds the role of vice-president of ICCASU (International Conference on Canadian, Chinese and African Sustainable Urbanization), focusing on the areas of housing and urban development across Canada, China, and Africa.

Of particular interest are 1) public housing constructed in the decades following WWII in Europe and North America, and its redevelopment from the 1990s onward, 2) urbanization, suburbanization and the study of large-scale housing ensembles in contemporary China, questioning the legacy of modernism and its transposition to different cultural and temporal contexts, and 3) the redevelopment of informal settlements in China, India and Africa, using design as a form of research to explore adaptable, culturally resonant, and market-friendly approaches to redevelopment. He is currently finishing a book on pre-WWII suburbanization in Pittsburgh, PA.

James Miller

Professor of Humanities, Associate Dean for Interdisciplinary Initiatives,
Duke Kunshan University

James Miller is Professor of Humanities and Associate Dean for Interdisciplinary Initiatives at Duke Kunshan University, a joint venture between Duke University (USA) and Wuhan University (China). Widely known as a scholar of Daoism, China's indigenous organized religion, Professor Miller has focused on Chinese philosophical and religious attitudes towards the relationship between the body and the environment. He has published seven books related to these areas, most notably, *China's Green Religion: Daoism and the Quest for a Sustainable Future* (Columbia 2017). He is the director of the Duke Kunshan core course "Let's Talk About Climate Change" and editor-in-chief of the journal *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*.

Nicole Karsch

Director of Programs,
London Environmental Network

Nicole Karsch has an Honours Specialization in Social Justice and Peace Studies and a Masters in Environment & Sustainability. She has experience working in academia, law,

and most recently, the environmental nonprofit sector. She is interested in the relationship between economic growth and environmental devastation, environmental justice, and issues of sovereignty over natural resources.

Karsch is a published author, and currently serves on the City of Sarnia's Environmental Advisory Committee, the City of London's Environmental Stewardship and Community Action Advisory Committee & Animal Welfare and Community Advisory Committee, as well as the King's Promise Advisory Board. She has received awards for her commitment to volunteerism and activism in the London and greater community.

At the London Environmental Network, Karsch works closely with nonprofit organizations to implement sustainable retrofit projects across their multi-unit residential buildings (MURBs), she provides mentorship and support to program managers, monitors and develops new services and initiatives, engages in advocacy work and assists with ensuring that the organization is meeting its Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Indigenization (EDII) goals.

Special Panelist

Bipasha Baruah

Professor, Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
Western Research Chair in Economy, Environment and Equity
Western University

Bipasha Baruah is Professor and Western Research Chair in Economy, Environment and Equity. Dr. Baruah earned a PhD in environmental studies from York University, Toronto. She specializes in interdisciplinary research at the intersections of gender, economy, environment, and development; gender and work; and social, political, and economic inequality. Most of her current research aims to understand how to ensure that a global low-carbon economy will be more gender equitable and socially just than its fossil-fuel based predecessor. Author of a book and more than 100 peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and other works, Dr. Baruah also serves frequently as an expert reviewer and advisor to Canadian and intergovernmental environmental protection and international development organizations. She will join the three panelists in the discussion session and speaks about how global urban transportation systems have changed in the past 20 years, and what implications these changes have had (or will have) upon gender equality and social justice.

Artists

Philip Gurrey

Born in York (UK) in 1984. Gurrey studied Painting and Printmaking at the Glasgow School of Art graduating with a BA (hons) in 2007. After working with Madder139 Gallery and the Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in London (UK), and working briefly in Copenhagen (Dk), Gurrey returned to the Glasgow School of Art to study a Master of Letters Degree in Fine Art Painting, graduating with distinction in 2012. In 2024 Gurrey completed his doctoral research at Western University in Art and Visual Culture which explored contemporary painting as an object-oriented concern through autopoietic improvisatory practices. Gurrey has exhibited throughout the UK, in France, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Canada and the US. His works are included in the Fondation Francès collection (Fr), the Mercer Art Gallery collection (UK) the Pathfoot Collection (UK) the British Airways Collection (UK) and private collections worldwide.

Alessia Romani

Alessia Romani is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at FAST Lab, Faculty of Engineering at Western University (Canada), specializing in the intersection of design, materials engineering, and additive manufacturing for sustainability. Previously, she earned her Ph.D. in Design (with Honors) from Politecnico di Milano (Italy), where she also gained extensive research experience at +LAB, Department of Chemistry, Materials, and Chemical Engineering. Her research focuses on merging design and engineering through digital technologies, open-source approaches, and new materials for circular economy and additive manufacturing. Romani's interdisciplinary research explores sustainability-driven strategies for design, parametric design, and the expressive qualities of materials.

Michelle Wilson

Michelle Wilson is a neurodivergent artist, researcher and mother who currently resides as an uninvited guest on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape, Attawandaron and Huron-Wendat peoples in London, Ontario. She is of settler descent and her intermedia practice focuses on confronting colonial knowledge systems and conservation regimes with criticality and care. She values collectivity and collaboration in her work and is an organizing and founding member of multiple collectives such as the Unsettling Conservation Collective, the Coves Collective, and the (Re)mediating Soils Collective. Currently, she's organizing exhibitions at Art Gallery of Guelph, McIntosh Gallery, and Woodstock Gallery for each of these groups.

Wilson completed her SSHRC-funded doctorate from the University of Western Ontario in 2022. She is currently an instructor in the Faculty of Design at OCADU and recently concluded a postdoctoral fellowship with the Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership at the University of Guelph.

Abstracts

James Miller

Let's Talk about Climate Change

Duke University and Duke Kunshan University have jointly made a commitment to put climate change at the center of their educational missions. A centerpiece of the academic side of this mission is the core course "Let's Talk About Climate Change" which operates in a similar format on both campuses in the fall each year. The two premises of the course are that talking about climate change is the first step to engaging with climate change, and that climate change changes everything across the academic spectrum. For this reason, the course is not billed as an environmental science course, but proceeds by engaging all disciplines in a discussion of climate change. A key design feature of the course is building a narrative affective arc that empowers students to be creative and active in their responses to the course material and to situate their engagement within the local community. In this way the issue of climate change is localized and personalized, foregrounding the affective dimension of the learning experience.

Nicole Karsch

Intersectional Environmentalism: A Critical Component for London's Nonprofit Sector

Karsch's presentation will unpack the connections between intersectionality and environmental justice. Sharing experiences from local projects that focus on nature-based solutions, new and emerging sustainable technologies, and climate equity in terms of opportunities for everyone to participate in climate action. Her talk will discuss how nonprofit organizations can engage in meaningful, inclusive and sustainable work that takes people's overlapping identities, vulnerabilities and experiences into consideration.

The objective of her presentation is to provide an overview of collaborative approaches that use theories of intersectionality and the power of participation to address complex issues experienced across Middlesex County. This intersectional approach identifies and answers difficult problems more completely, creatively, and equitably, establishing conditions in which desired outcome(s) can be achieved. To close, her presentation will highlight why adopting an intersectional approach is essential for the day-to-day work and programming of environmental nonprofit organizations.

Philip Gurrey

The Painter and their Art in the Anthropocene

The relationship between a painter and their painting is an often-discussed topic. Evidence of this can be found throughout art history and in the texts which accompany paintings in museums and galleries across the world. One might think of how the psychological states of Van Gogh might have affected his choice of subject matter and whether we, as a viewer, can gain access to this introspection by way of his art. The

focus of this presentation is to side-step this relationship and ask what other aspects of a creative process affect the way in which a painting is made. Gurrey questions the extent to which a painter can truly dictate a viewer's interpretation through their canvas. He explores whether the artist's intentions are just one among a larger set of influences that collectively impact the outcome of a painting. His presentation asks, how might the creative act be affected by the current ecological crisis, and how might an ecological disposition destabilize or alter the painter/painting relationship.

When a painter stands alone in their studio confronted with a blank canvas or even an artwork that is nearing completion something peculiar but inevitable happens. The artist forms a relationship of sorts with the painting in front of them. A dialogue begins to happen. This relationship between artist and artwork is a physical, sensitive, intuitive exchange. Gurrey's presentation explores what happens both practically and theoretically when this relationship is investigated further. Is it possible to identify what affects the creative act and effectively informs the decision making of the painter? And how might they respond to this knowledge acquisition?

Alessia Romani

*New Materialities and Narratives Enabled by Digital Fabrication:
Connecting Engineering and Design to Arts through 3D Printing*

Additive Manufacturing, commonly known as 3D printing, is currently exploited for several applications thanks to its capability to fabricate freeform shapes and intricate geometries, ranging from technical sectors to everyday personalized objects. Industries, researchers, and engineers have extensively exploited this manufacturing technology, focusing on its reliability and aiming to improve the process capabilities. At the same time, this digital manufacturing technology unlocks new formal and aesthetic possibilities by making the virtual realm tangible, captivating designers, artists, and craftspeople. Merging these two perspectives enables to explore new materialities and narratives by fostering interdisciplinary approaches, detecting novel opportunities for digital fabrication. Romani argues the role of 3D printing in connecting engineering and design to arts, focusing on the potential for new materialities and narratives in the context of digital sculptures. Her discussion presents some exhibition projects as case studies connecting designers, engineers, artists, and the general audience through 3D printing, defining new ways to use materialities from digital fabrication as narratives to reflect on sustainability-related issues.

Michelle Wilson

Hopepunk: Community, Criticality, and Care

Coined by fantasy author Alexandra Rowland, *hopepunk* describes a speculative world-making that envisions mutual aid, collective action, and radical kindness as a response to the twin spectres of social and ecological catastrophe. In this presentation, Wilson will discuss how the Coves Collective and the Unsettling Conservation Collective, land and community-based collectives she has co-founded, are guided by a hopepunk ethos that allows members to care fiercely in a time of immense grief. This slow and intentional work has produced relational and material artworks that enact direct action,

accessibility, collaboration, and justice. Though this work is sometimes displayed in a gallery, it is most vividly found in fields, on the banks of streams, and shared around cups of tea made on a camp stove. In this talk, Wilson asks, as Ross Gay does in *Inciting Joy*, "What if joy is not only entangled with pain, suffering, or sorrow, but is also what emerges from how we care for each other through those things? What if joy, instead of being a refuge or relief from heartbreak, is what effloresces from us as we help each other carry our heartbreaks?" Wilson will reflect on the inheritance of hopepunk from writers such as Octavia Butler, Ross Gay, and adrienne maree brown, highlighting the joy and resilience that emerges from collective care, as well as practical ways her collective work has mobilized grassroots efforts and redistributed institutional privileges to benefit community members.

[Exhibition] *Sustainable Cities: A Collective Eclipsing*

Artlab Gallery, John Labatt Visual Art Centre, Western University

November 14 – December 5, 2024

This group exhibition is curated by Imogen Clendinning, and is presented as a key feature of the broader SustainableCities Connect Workshop project, organized and led by Junyu Ke.

In *Sustainable Cities: A Collective Eclipsing*, artists Theo Cuthand, Philip Gurrey, Jessica Joyce, Danielle Petti, Michelle Wilson and Brigitta Zhao form new methods of creative production which utilize technology and the sciences to cultivate exploratory systems of making. By foregrounding sustainability, relations with the Earth, and critiquing colonial systems of extraction, *A Collective Eclipsing* reckons with the various intangible collaborative dynamics that are embedded in all acts of making. These intangible systems of exchange are made visible through the ways in which each work responds to the environment around it, thematically but also through the use of solar-powered digital technologies.

Partnering with the Free Appropriate Sustainable Technology (FAST) research group in Western Engineering, *A Collective Eclipsing* features several new artworks shaped by interdisciplinary collaboration between Western's Visual Arts graduate students and the FAST lab, including Danielle Petti and Jessica Joyce's solar-powered lightboxes, in a celebration of off the grid energy technologies that require collaboration between the Sun, weather, the artist and engineer, and a 3-d printed sculpture by Philip Gurrey, which uses recycled plastics it explores the material agency or the plasticity of corn.

In Brigitta Zhao's data visualization works, she combined video and audio in a multisensory experience. Her *Fueling the Waves* animates oceanic data, emphasizing the environmental impacts of pollution on oceans in Nova Scotia. Theo Cuthand, Western Visual Art's current Indigenous Artist-in-Residence, will exhibit his newest decolonial interactive game on a solar-powered microcomputer. Cuthand explores the relationships between artworks and museums, and the issue of ownership and exhibition of ancestral remains. His process employs humor and low-fi aesthetics to educate attendees on the work of decolonizing museums and institutional spaces; incorporating activism and environmental advocacy at once. Michelle Wilson's (un)making barbed wire pulls up barbed wire from the land on a biodynamic farm. The artist notes how this wire "scars the land," committing to a performative act of healing through the methodical removal of this man-made material, this symbol of settler-colonial extraction. Wilson feeds the wire into a glass demijohn, covering it in water and vinegar in order to break down the wire into ink.

Additionally, the exhibition will feature an environmental play centered on a native flower *Rudbeckia*, sponsored by Western Community Garden. This play explores the broader societal and environmental implications of art, and serves as a narrative anchor that connects the exhibition's themes, grounding them in a profound embodiment of the human-environment relationship to provoke deep philosophical and ecological reflections.

Acknowledgment

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Western Sustainable Impact Fund

Western Research

Society of Graduate Students

Western Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies

Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies

Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism

Office of Indigenous Initiatives

Department of Visual Arts

artLAB Gallery

Faculty of Engineering, the Free Appropriate Sustainable Technology (FAST) research group

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek (Ah-nish-in-a-bek), Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-no-show-nee), Lūnaapéewak (Len-ahpay-wuk) and Chonnonton (Chun-ongk-ton) Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum.

With this, we respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research and community service.