



**Forging multidisciplinary alliances in the Plasticocene  
February 4, 2026**

**Program overview**

If you have not registered or have not received the zoom link for the meeting, please register here:  
<https://uottawa-ca.zoom.us/meeting/register/8iM7FoQ-TPm6F5bOfTD4Yg#/registration>

If you have any difficulties connecting, please contact Caroline Facher [cfauche2@uottawa.ca](mailto:cfauche2@uottawa.ca)

**All times are EST**

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| 12:00-12:10 | Acknowledgement of unceded Indigenous territories<br><br>Introduction to the series, <i>Arts + Human Rights in Conversation</i> , Penelope Simon<br><br>Introduction to <i>Forging multidisciplinary alliances in the Plasticocene</i> , Oonagh Fitzgerald |
| 12:10-12:35 | Introductions of participants (name, most important affiliation, and what you do relating to plastic pollution in 90 seconds)  |
| 12:35-12:50 | Question 1. With such diversity of expertise relating to plastic pollution, what can we accomplish through multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary interaction?  |
| 12:50-13:05 | Question 2. In the context of combatting plastic pollution, does professionalism require activism?   |
| 13:05-13:20 | Question 3. How can the arts help us expand our knowledge and communicate about the problem of plastic pollution?  |
| 13:20-13:35 | Question 4. Collectively and individually, how can we help reduce plastic waste and contribute to raising awareness about the multiple dimensions of the problem of plastic pollution?   |
| 13:35-13:50 | Question 5. What outcomes would you like to see from today's conversation? Would a multidisciplinary manifesto to end plastic pollution be a worthwhile outcome?   |
| 13:50-14:00 | Next steps and closing remarks.  |
| 2:00        | Close of consultation.   |

## Questions and provocations for discussion

**Question 1. With such diversity of expertise relating to plastic pollution, what can we accomplish through multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary interaction?**

### *Multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary interaction and collaboration<sup>1</sup>*

“What is ‘Transdisciplinary’?”

Transdisciplinary work involves collaborators from multiple disciplines in a co-equal partnership, in which they collectively define and develop new opportunities (conceptual understanding, theoretical models, etc.) that move beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. Transdisciplinarity has been described as a practice that transgresses and transcends disciplinary boundaries and has the most potential to respond to new and emerging human problems and opportunities.”

“Seven principles for guidance of transdisciplinary research (TDR):

1. Orientation to societal challenges
2. Grasping the complexity of problems
3. Develop knowledge and practices that promote what is perceived as common good
4. Integrating different perspectives
5. Producing systems, target, and transformation knowledge
6. Science as part of a social learning process
7. Linking abstract and case-specific knowledge.”

**Question 2. In the context of combatting plastic pollution, does professionalism require activism?**

### *Connections between working on aspects of plastic pollution, human rights and social activism<sup>2</sup>*

"It means a great deal to those who are oppressed to know that they are not alone. Never let anyone tell you that what you are doing is insignificant."

Desmond Tutu

“Activism works. So what I’m telling you to do now, is to act. Because no one is too small to make a difference.”

Greta Thunberg

“Get up, stand up, Stand up for your rights. Get up, stand up, Don't give up the fight.”

Bob Marley

“Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.”

Malala Yousafzai

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<sup>1</sup> Extracted from: Purdue University, “What is ‘transdisciplinary’?” <https://www.purdue.edu/provost/innovation-hub/what-we-do/why-transdisciplinary/#:~:text=Transdisciplinary%20work%20involves%20collaborators%20from,move%20beyond%20traditional%20disciplinary%20boundaries>; Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences, “Networks of transdisciplinary research,” <https://en.transdisciplinarity.ch/transdisciplinarity/principles-of-transdisciplinary-research/goals-and-principles>, accessed January 29 2026.

<sup>2</sup> Extracted from: Amnesty International UK, “15 inspiring human rights quotes”, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/15-inspiring-human-rights-quotes>, accessed January 29 2026.

**Question 3. How can the arts help us expand our knowledge and communicate about the problem of plastic pollution?**

*Connections between the arts and human rights*<sup>3</sup>

“Art is not what you see, but what you make others see.” – Edgar Degas

“Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.” - Bertolt Brecht

“Beauty will save the world.” - Dostoevsky

“My imagination can picture no fairer happiness than to continue living for art.” – Clara Schumann

“Art is a wound turned into light.”- Georges Braque

“A good picture is equivalent to a good deed.” -Vincent van Gogh

“The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.” – Aristotle

“I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn’t say any other way – things I had no words for.” – Georgia O’Keeffe

“Art is the only way to run away without leaving home.” – Twyla Tharp

“Art is the daughter of freedom.” – Friedrich Schiller

“The artist is a receptacle for emotions that come from all over the place: from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider’s web.” – Pablo Picasso

**Question 4. Collectively and individually, how can we help reduce plastic waste and contribute to raising awareness about the multiple dimensions of the problem of plastic pollution?**

*Connections between plastic pollution, science, human rights and rights of nature*<sup>4</sup>

“Industrial pollution and the discarding of plastic waste must be tackled for the sake of all life in the ocean.” – Sir David Attenborough, British naturalist and documentary filmmaker.

“Plastic waste is now found in the most remote areas of the planet. It kills marine life and is doing major harm to communities that depend on fishing and tourism.” – António Guterres, UN secretary general.

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<sup>3</sup> Extracted from two online lists: Center for the Advancement of Well-being, “Famous Quotes on Art and Well-Being,” <https://wellbeing.gmu.edu/famous-quotes-on-art-and-well-being/>; Creativity at Work, “99 Inspiring Quotations on Art, Creativity, Life and Livelihood,” <https://www.creativityatwork.com/quotations-creative-spirit-in-art-and-livelihood/>, accessed January 29 2026.

<sup>4</sup> Extracted from: Earth Org, “15 Plastic Pollution Quotes to Inspire You to Go Waste Free,” <https://earth.org/plastic-pollution-quotes/>, accessed January 29 2026.

“Not only are plastics polluting our oceans and waterways and killing marine life – it’s in all of us and we can’t escape consuming plastics.” – Marco Lambertini, Director General of WWF International.

“There is no such thing as ‘away’. When we throw anything away, it must go somewhere.” – Annie Leonard, executive director of Greenpeace USA.

“Only we humans make waste that nature can’t digest.” – Captain Charles J Moore, oceanographer, who first brought the world’s attention to the Great Garbage Patch.

“Plastic pollution free world is not a choice but a commitment to life – a commitment to the next generation.” – Amit Ray, Indian author and spiritual master.

“If it can’t be reduced, reused, repaired, rebuilt, refurbished, resold, recycled, or composted, then it should be restricted, redesigned or removed from production.” – Pete Seeger’s song *Garbage*.

“We humans have become dependent on plastic for a range of uses, from packaging to products. Reducing our use of plastic bags is an easy place to start getting our addiction under control.” – David Suzuki, Canadian scientist, author and environmental activist.

“For all the environmental troubles single-use shopping bags cause, the much greater impacts are in what they contain. Reducing the human footprint means addressing fundamentally unsustainable habits of food consumption, such as expecting strawberries in the depths of winter or buying of seafood that are being fished to the brink of extinction.” – Susan Freinkel, author of *Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*.

**Question 5. What outcomes would you like to see from today’s conversation? Would a multidisciplinary manifesto to end plastic pollution be a worthwhile outcome?**

## Confirmed Participants

**Dr. Adam Damry** is an Assistant Professor in the uOttawa Department of Chemistry and Biomolecular Sciences, and a Canada Research Chair in Synthetic Biology. His research examines how enzymes interact with solid elements in their medium, to understand, engineer, and diversify plastic degrading enzymes.



- The place of biotechnology in plastic recycling processes and plastic pollution detection systems, along with ongoing bioremediation efforts.

**Dr. Alexandra R. Harrington**, is Lecturer in Law at Lancaster University Law School, Chair of the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law Agreement on Plastic Pollution Task Force: international law and policy perspectives about oceanic pollution, small island nations, advocacy for the development of an international treaty to eliminate plastic pollution



- The state of negotiations for a binding treaty to eliminate plastic pollution in advance of the one-day INC-5.3 meeting in Geneva.

**Dr. Celeste Nazeli Snowber** is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, and integrates dance and poetics in site-specific performances in the natural world.



- How the body and the arts forms, informs and transforms relationship to ecology.

**Dr. Eldad Tsabary**, Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies, Fine Arts, Concordia University.



- Creating a sound installation, *Waste Whisperer* (2023), from recycled speakers and electrical equipment.

**Dr. Graeme Reed** is a strategic advisor with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), where he advocates for the inclusion of First Nations in international, national and regional dialogues around climate change and energy policy. Graeme is Anishinaabe from the Great Lakes (Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory) with mixed ancestry from England, Scotland and Germany.



- Indigenous resilience in the climate crises.

**Dr. Jan Mennigen** is an Associate Professor in Biology at the University of Ottawa, whose research is at the intersection of Aquatic Toxicology and Comparative Physiology. He has worked on the effects of microplastics alone and as contaminant vectors using zebrafish, a newly emerging model for alternative risk assessment conforming to requirements of Bill S-5.



- Connecting biology to public policy and law on plastic pollution.

**Dr. John Frederick Packer**, Associate Professor, Neuberger-Jesin Professor of International Conflict Resolution, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa, former director of HRREC and its Arts and Human Rights initiative.



- Connecting the arts and human rights.

**Jon Jon** is a Montreal-based animator, artist & sculptor who focuses on innovative techniques, material properties, and art experimentation to find micro-solutions for an adaptive and aesthetic future. His experience spans across independent animated films, interactive arts, sculpture, portraiture, grass roots recycling research and open-source innovations.



- Connecting art, philosophy and science to shape our future; practical applications for plastic sequestration sculpture.

**Dr. Kirsty Robertson** is Canada Research Chair in Museums, Art, and Sustainability in the Department of Visual Arts at Western University, where she also directs the Centre for Sustainable Curating. Kirsty is a founding member of the Synthetic Collection, an art science collaboration focused on reducing plastic pollution in the Great Lakes region.



- How the arts and exhibitions can contribute to research and action related to plastics consumption, pollution, and conservation (as in the conservation of art works made from plastic).

**Dr. Kyra St. Pierre** is a biogeochemist and an assistant professor in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences U Ottawa whose research group adopts a holistic approach grounded in local priorities to understand how contaminants move and are transformed through the environment.



- Use of plastics is ubiquitous in the study of other environmental contaminants (i.e., heavy metals) that have serious consequences for environmental and public health - how do we balance the need for scientific rigour while reducing plastics in the environment?

**Dr. Lorrie Blair**, professor of art education at Concordia University, recently did a residency on cyanotypes and mine waste in the Santa Ynez River in California. Her work is about the environmental legacy of mercury mining and how this pollutes waterways and the landscapes.



- photographic works bringing an awareness of the environmental effects of the extractive industries.

**Maria C. Fitzgerald** is an artist and former high school science teacher who is currently writing a book on deep-sea mining.



- Her comic book "*My Plastic Bottle Life*" reveals some aspects of the life cycle of a plastic bottle.

**Dr. Oonagh E. Fitzgerald**, Senior Fellow at HRREC and President of the International Law



Association of Canada, practices transdisciplinary international law-arts research-creation (TILARC) about human rights, humanitarian, technological and the environmental crises.

- TILARC practice relating to plastic pollution, *Amazonia Goddess of Waste*, *Madonna of Perpetual Plastic*.

**Dr. Penelope Simons** is the Director of the Human Rights Research and Education Centre, and Professor of Law, University of Ottawa.



- Introduction to HRREC Arts and Human Rights initiative

**Dr. Ramon Blanco-Barrera** is an Associate Professor at the Department of Drawing, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Seville, Spain, and a Fellow Member at the Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa, Canada.



- Social activism and activism to eliminate excessive use of plastic and find sustainable alternatives.

**Van Armenian** is an SSHRC Doctoral Fellow and PhD Candidate in Interdisciplinary Research in Music at the University of Ottawa, and a member of the Human Rights Research and Education Centre, working at the intersection of human rights and the arts.



- Connecting land, music, and environmental responsibility: Music as a practical bridge to Indigenous-informed environmental action on plastic pollution.