

FIRST PREPARATORY WORKSHOP

for April 12-13 2022

Arts and Human Rights Symposium -
Building Positive Relations: The Arts, New Materialism,
Posthumanism & Human Rights

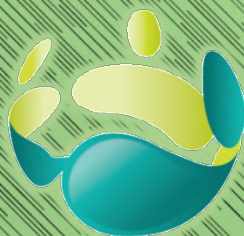


Friday January 14th 2022
Workshop
What are Human Rights
in the Post Human Age
of the Anthropocene?

This event is held via ZOOM

Centre
de recherche
et d'enseignement
sur les

DROITS DE LA PERSONNE



HUMAN RIGHTS
Research
and
Education
Centre

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DETAILED AGENDA

10:30 - 10:45: Welcome:

- Land acknowledgement
- Introduction and background to the project

10:45 - 11:15: Roundtable introductions on the theme of human rights and art in the post human age of the Anthropocene

- What is your practice or research focus?
- How does it relate to human rights and art in the post human age of the Anthropocene?

11:15 - 11:45: Group discussion:

- Consider examples of human rights in relation to our surroundings and environment. How do you see human rights in the post human age of the Anthropocene?
- Explore how art\dance\theatre\music making and performance can express ideas about the post human in the Anthropocene.
- Are concepts of human rights adequate for today's global and local environmental challenges, or are they causing us to miss important dimensions?

11:45 - 12:00: Discussion of developing a manifesto on art and human rights:

- What words are needed in terms of shifting directions and expressing solidarity?
- How could art\dance\theatre\music making and performance contribute to expressing this shift and alignment around core values?
- What approaches would you suggest for developing the concept note and the manifesto?

12:00 - 12:10: Roundtable - last thoughts and takeaways:

- What are your final reflections on art and human rights in the post human age of the Anthropocene?
- Do you have you any suggestions for the next workshop and the symposium?

12:10 - 12:15: Wrap up, acknowledgements, and closing.

PARTICIPANTS



Al-An deSouza

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Al-An deSouza is an artist, and Professor and Department Chair of Art Practice at University of California, Berkeley. They work in photo-media, installation, text and performance, and have published two recent books: Ark of Martyrs (2020), and How Art Can Be Thought (2018).

Ann Wettrich is an artist, educator and arts consultant based in the San Francisco Bay Area in the US. Her current work addresses pressing social, cultural and environmental concerns. She is one of two lead artists from Fieldworks Collaborative; Director of Programs & Administration for Emergent Art Space working with young artists across the globe. For well over forty years, she has served in creative leadership, program development and advisory roles with numerous educational institutions, civic agencies and nonprofit organizations.

Ann Wettrich

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Anoush Moazzeni

Concert pianist, interdisciplinary composer, artist researcher, PhD Candidate at Concordia university
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Iranian-Canadian concert pianist, interdisciplinary composer, artist-researcher, educator and Ph.D candidate in individualized studies in fine arts, Anoush Moazzeni enjoys a performing career that has, frequently, taken her around the world. The development of her art incorporates the interaction between artistic interpretation and scholarly reflection; particular areas of her interest in research-creation include artistic research and philosophy on stage.

Dirar Kalash is a musician and sound artist whose work spans a wide range of musical and sonic practices within a variety of compositional and improvisational contexts, he is also an independent researcher.

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Elizabeth Presa

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I am an artist living on Dja Dja Wurung country in south eastern Australia and teach Sculpture and Art Theory at the VCA, The University of Melbourne. My research is conducted through art and philosophy. Currently I am researching ancient augural practices as prompts to developing more contemplative and ethical relationships to the environment.

Elsy Zavarce is a Ph.D. student in Art Education, Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University, Montreal. She is a multidisciplinary visual artist, researcher, and an emeritus professor of Architecture and Design at Zulia University. She was born in Canada and grew up in Venezuela. Her work is part of public and private collections in South and North America. She is in constant experimentation, exploring different mediums and materiality, dealing with memory, resistance, and global concerns of a citizen of the world. Now being forced to be an immigrant, she examines the notion of belonging, territories, diaspora, and identities

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Esther Regueira Mauriz

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Art historian, curator and editor that works in contemporary art projects approaching art from a social perspective. She has curated exhibitions at many art spaces internationally. In 2008 he started, together with Alonso Gil and Angustias García, Sahara Libre Wear, a textile art project and fashion label in the Refugees Camps in Western Sahara. She has been invited professor at the Universities of Goteborg, Granada, Seville or San Petersburg. She is about to defend her dissertation PhD in Philosophy.

Great experience as a cooperant, especially in the Western Sahara. In 2007, the Association of Friendship with the Saharawi People of Seville, in collaboration with the Saharawi Ministry of Culture, created the Festival of Art and Human Rights in the liberated territories of Western Sahara, in Tifariti, which was called "ARTifariti". Hundreds of artists have come from all over the world: NY, London, Berlin, Mexico, Argentina, Algeria, Spain.

Fernando Peraita

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Gloria Song

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Gloria Song is a Ph.D. candidate in Law at the University of Ottawa, researching access to justice, housing, and gender in Nunavut. She is also a project coordinator for the Law Society of Nunavut, and an analyst with Polar Knowledge Canada, where she leads Canada's implementation of polar science diplomacy treaties.

Neuberger-Jesin Professor of International Conflict Resolution, Faculty of Law, and HRREC Director at the University of Ottawa, 35 years experience as a practitioner/scholar working at the international level toward the effective realisation of human rights including minority rights, preventive diplomacy, transitional arrangements and genocide prevention.

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Kanienkehaka Bear Clan, Associate Professor of Indigenous Studies, Assistant Vice President Indigenous Initiatives.

Kimika es the artist name of Kimiko Nonomura. She studied Traditional Japanese Painting Materials and at the same time Painting Techniques, at the Aichi University of Fine Arts and Music. She worked as an Art Restoration Technician at the National Cultural Heritage Conservation Center of the Kyoto National Museum. She has participated in successive editions of ARTifariti, the International Festival of Art and Human Rights in the Saharawi Refugee Camps of Tindouf, Algeria.

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Lorrie Blair

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Lorrie Blair is a professor in Art Education at Concordia University in Montreal. Her teaching and research interests include artistic research and ethics, qualitative research methodologies, art teacher identity, teenage cultural practices, accessible photography, and craft practices. She is the author of *Writing a Graduate Thesis or Dissertation* (2016, Brill).

Exploring the nexus between art and current theories and practices of human rights, Omid B. Milani is the curator of *Images of Justice*, a political cartoon series on human rights issues as a part of CONTEKST, a research project on the Image-Law relationship. <https://www.Contekst.Education/>

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Oonagh E. Fitzgerald, B.F.A., LL.B., LL.M., M.B.A., S.J.D., Member of the Law Society of Ontario. I am an artist and international lawyer, a Senior Fellow at the Human Rights Research and Education Centre, a Vice-President of the International Law Association of Canada, Co-Chair of the Canadian Environmental Domestic Advisory Group under CETA, and an INDI PhD student in the Fine Arts Programme, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. Website: <https://oonaghfitzgerald.ca>

Ramon is a Social Catalyst & Artist who sends social and political messages intended to inspire people to reflect about their communities, both local and universal. Ph.D. (2021). Currently, Faculty Member of Fine Arts at the University of Seville (Spain) teaching new media-based courses.

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Professor of Music, Concordia University, Canada. Director of the international symposia Balance-Unbalance (BunB) on how the media arts could contribute to solving the environmental crisis, and Understanding Visual Music (UVM). Creator of the Latin American Electroacoustic Music Collection hosted by The Langlois Foundation, Canada. Former UNESCO researcher and Hexagram director.

Academic Dean of Arts & English at the College of the Sequoias in California. Past Dean of Arts at Lane Community College, Oregon, Associate Professor of Art at South Texas College, and Instructor of Art at the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico. MFA in Painting and Drawing, BA Art, AA Liberal Arts. 2013 Fulbright Research Chair in Human Rights and Social Justice at uOttawa, past College Arts Association Education Committee Chair and current Professional Practice Committee member.

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Artist and researcher.
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SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction and Background to the Project

Following a land acknowledgement to recognize the Indigenous peoples on whose traditional territories some participants are based, the facilitators introduced the project.

Consideration of the connections between the arts and human rights began eight years ago at the University of Ottawa's Human Rights Research and Education Centre (HRREC). It was spurred by a recognition of the need to shift human rights discourse from its traditional conceptual preoccupation with **human rights as a shield** (to protect against abuse, usually by the state) to a more expansive notion of **human rights as a flame** (to mobilize the universal potential of humans to fulfill themselves individually and collectively, and to enjoy the prospects of a full life, in dignity and freedom).

Because the typical tools for advocating for human rights historically have been limited to textual forms of engagement (international treaties, resolutions, law making, and litigation), HRREC sought to engage with the arts as a way to broaden understanding and conceptualization of human rights, based on the following rationale:

- **the arts as communication**, with the arts capable of expressing and conveying meaning in different ways than a text;
- **the arts as integral to human existence**, with creativity and innovation being universal features of the human experience, reflected in all human civilizations;
- **artists as “canaries in the mine”** who, through their functions in challenging established and dominant orthodoxies, may expose themselves to repression.

A series of engagements were held from 2015 to the present – a symposium, a summer school, and several cartoon competitions – for the purposes of exploring the interconnections between the arts and human rights, and related Indigenous perspectives.

The upcoming April Arts and Human Rights Symposium, *Building Positive Relations: The Arts, New Materialism, Posthumanism & Human Rights*, and the two January preparatory workshops are the latest project on the theme of the arts and human rights. This latest project emphasizes developments in philosophical and critical art studies related to new materialism and post-humanism, to understand the implications these might have for reconceiving human rights for the multiple crises of the Anthropocene.

Questions were provided to participants in advance for discussion at the workshop:

- What is your practice or research focus?
- How does it relate to human rights and art in the post human age of the Anthropocene?
- Consider examples of human rights in relation to our surroundings and environment. How do you see human rights in the post human age of the Anthropocene?
- Explore how art\dance\theatre\music making and performance can express ideas about the post human in the Anthropocene.
- Are concepts of human rights adequate for today's global and local environmental challenges, or are they causing us to miss important dimensions?
- What words are needed in terms of shifting directions and expressing solidarity?

- How could art\dance\theatre\music making and performance contribute to expressing this shift and alignment around core values?
- What approaches would you suggest for developing the concept note and the manifesto?
- What are your final reflections on art and human rights in the post human age of the Anthropocene?
- Do you have you any suggestions for the next workshop and the symposium?

Roundtable introductions on the theme of human rights & the arts in the post human age of the Anthropocene

Participants briefly introduced themselves and their work, providing a diverse array of examples of the relationship between human rights and a wide range of artistic practices. Many examples involved socially engaged artistic practices of bringing people together, often in a cross-disciplinary context, for human rights and environmental expression and activism, with objectives of mobilization, empowerment, and amplification. Given the theme of this workshop was on rethinking Human Rights in the Post Human Age of the Anthropocene, participants discussed a broader holistic concept of human rights that included protection of the environment and against climate change, but also responsibility towards the environment and all that surrounds us, whether animate or inanimate. The participants explored ways to avoid the anthropocentric, dualist, humanist traps of treating humans as being separate from and masters of nature, rather than embedded creatures wholly dependent on our environment for survival. Participants considered how new materialism and a focus on situated knowledge and Indigenous worldviews might illuminate a way to be post-human and understand post-human human rights.

Other themes on the interconnection between art and human rights that came up during this introductory roundtable include:

- the arts as catalyzers for creating effective change
- the arts as illuminators of social constructions in law and academia
- the work to be done in academic art institutions to move towards anti-oppression frameworks (anti-racism, decolonization, etc.)
- the material environmental impact of traditional art studies and practice
- the use of storytelling to understand differently situated knowledge and trace people's standpoints as being embedded within broader interconnected systems and timelines.

Group discussion

Addressing divergent epistemologies and ontologies

A key theme that emerged during this part of the discussion was the inherent limitation of **language and its implications for our ways of knowing**. Different languages encode symbols, concepts, and understandings, representing different epistemologies and worldviews that may not be easily reconcilable. For example, holding the present discussion in English means invoking certain Western-specific conceptions of terms like "law" or "artistic practice" that are different from – and potentially exclusionary of – expressions of Indigenous legal

orders and worldviews. It is important to acknowledge the way language can influence and limit our ways of thinking. This is related to another issue of the arts as communication: because each person will take away different understandings based on different ways of thinking, one cannot know precisely what the arts communicate.

Participants discussed how to deal with this limitation of language and multiple meanings representing multiple worldviews, as it is important to consider how law, human rights, and the arts are conceptualized. Some insights for **processes to account for divergent epistemologies, ontologies, and conceptions of law, human rights, and the arts** that emerged include:

- **Acknowledging:** being aware that language may embed power, gender, race, social, environmental, and economic structures and traditions.
- **Situating:** in recognizing this multiplicity of ways of knowing, constantly situating one's own standpoint and the philosophical foundation upon which it is based to provide one's reference point.
- **Listening:** listening to each other with open minds, hearts and ears and remembering our standpoints as being connected to a larger collective with common goals and with responsibilities towards each other. Learning from Indigenous thought and practice can inspire awareness and openness.
- **Being in Conversation:** in allowing for multiple ways of thinking within a common space, the experiential process of conversation itself (like in this workshop) could potentially help definitions and their meanings to evolve. As our vocabulary becomes enriched, new possibilities of thought and action may arise.

Participants noted that during this process of inquiry, it is important to consider whether the **objective** of this process is to reduce these different standpoints to a set of principles upon which all can agree, or to be content to operate in a space that is complex and possibly paradoxical as a part of our condition as living beings. Some participants suggested that this process itself may be more important to highlight than a particular final product or result. In international law "strategic ambiguity", whereby parties take different meanings from words and texts, is sometimes used as a negotiating tactic to smooth over difficult issues but it can have drastic consequences when the depth of disagreement later becomes apparent. In the context of this project, it will be useful to acknowledge rather than mask these moments of discord.

Conceptualizing law, human rights, and the arts

Participants also discussed how human rights is, can be, and should be conceptualized with respect to the arts.

The limitations of human rights and the law:

- Human rights are not frozen or static and are always contextual: violations occur within a particular context.
- A post-human and post-anthropocentric conception of human rights should transcend dualistic approaches such as nature versus culture, animate versus non-animate, gender binaries, etc.

- The orientation of the arts and law may be seen as diametrically opposed: while law seeks to distill complex realities to a singular rule, the arts may distill to essences, reproduce perceived reality or celebrate multiplicities, complexities and new possibilities.
- From another perspective, law can be seen as inseparable from the arts: law is a narrative that involves the art of writing, and therefore in this way law cannot be conceived in absence of art. From this perspective, the separation between the materiality of our experience of law and law as an abstract concept is anthropocentric, colonizing and Euro-centric.
- The expression of human rights must contend with diverse languages and cultures making it challenging to develop and articulate universal concepts of human rights.
- It is important to note that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is shaped by Canada's two "official" languages (English and French) and the Western anthropocentric, colonial paradigm and therefore may not adequately address some of the ideas being discussed.

The role of the arts:

- The arts may help overcome these inadequacies in conceptualizing human rights in a post-human age, especially to draw in different ways of knowing (including non-human).
- The arts are not apolitical – they reproduce and benefit from existing legal orders and contribute to global problems such as environmental destruction and pollution.
- The arts can also be used to bring different actors together (such as scientists, lawyers, politicians, artists and communities) to build solidarity and work towards a common goal.
- It should be noted however, that there are different conceptions and understandings across cultures about the arts.
- Given the potential for multiple meanings and understanding, the audience's engagement with a work of art (and how it is communicated) must be considered as part of the art, beyond the piece of art and its exposition or performance.
- The arts can make visible what is happening in the world that is not represented by those in power, such as violations of human rights and destruction of the environment.
- However, an important function of the arts is not just representation, but also transformation, comparable to the function of shamans, revealing new perceptions, compelling action to change power structures and develop new knowledge production.
- The arts may provide a means of expression and symbolic and real action when experts and lawmakers are still quibbling over language of international texts (e.g., the debate over phasing *out* or phasing *down* coal-fired power generation at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26)). Climate action and protection of biodiversity cannot wait for perfect texts to be negotiated: it is imperative to move to action as quickly as possible.

Developing a manifesto on the arts and human rights

The facilitators noted that the discussion of language and cultural diversity highlighted some of the anticipated challenges the group will encounter in developing a manifesto on the arts and human rights. Participants were asked to reflect upon how the conversation so far can help lead to expressing a manifesto on the arts and human rights, and what form such a manifesto might take.

Last thoughts and takeaways

The facilitators summarized the key themes emerging from this discussion, including the inevitable challenges of communicating across languages, cultures, and perspectives, the strategies for situating each of us among these differences, the importance of the process of discussion, and considerations for transforming our conceptions of human rights.

Participants were thanked for their engagement and assured that the workshop discussion will inform the next workshop and the symposium.



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