

OPEN CALL

OCEAN / UNI

"IMAGINE THE OCEAN DRY AS LAVENDER"

~ SECOND CYCLE ~

THE MEDITERRANEANS BEYOND ARIDITY

February 1– April 5, 2023

6 biweekly public sessions

4 activations

A collaborative learning initiative by TBA21–Academy

Online via Zoom and on [Ocean-Archive.org](https://ocean-archive.org)

OCEAN / UNI is an art–activism–law–science learning initiative, online, tuition free, and open to the general public. The curriculum invites fluid thinking with the Ocean as a way to move towards more amphibious actions, beyond the binaries of land and sea. Aiming to complement and enhance land-based understanding of the Earth, it covers a wide range of ecological, political, aesthetic, ethical, and scientific topics around the realities and futures of the Ocean.

The Spring semester of **OCEAN / UNI 2023** is curated and developed by **Barbara Casavecchia**, Writer, Independent Curator and Educator, Leader of *The Current III "Mediterraneans: 'Thus waves come in pairs' (after Etel Adnan)"*; **Chiara Cartuccia**, Independent Curator and Researcher, founder of EX NUNC; **Pietro Consolandi**, OCEAN / UNI Research Lead, Artist and Writer; alongside **Aleksandra Czerniak**, Digital Project & Transformation Manager; **Michal Kučerák**, Head of Digital Research; **Petra Linhartová**; Director of Digital & Innovation; **Fiona Middleton**, Research & Community; and **Markus Reymann**, Director of TBA21–Academy. Graphic design: **Lana Jerichová**.

Produced with care by the TBA21–Academy team.



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// SPRING SEMESTER 2023

The second cycle of "Imagine the Ocean Dry as Lavender"¹ brings OCEAN / UNI back to the Mediterraneans and their warming seas as hotspots for highly interconnected climate risks. The program is developed by TBA21–Academy in collaboration with research-based curatorial platform EX NUNC.² In its first iteration, "Imagine the Ocean Dry as Lavender" focused on the topic of aridity in relation to the Mediterranean Sea and, in extension, to other parts of the world undergoing processes of aridification and "mediterraneization", so to imagine possible planetary scenarios in a rapidly heating climate. During this second cycle we wish to deepen an enquiry into the connections between climate politics and the ever-renewing processes and modes of coloniality in the Mediterraneans.

In 2022, millions of inhabitants along Mediterranean shores experienced one of the driest and hottest years in centuries. In its Sixth Assessment Report released in April 2022, for the first time the IPCC³ framed the Mediterranean Basin as a single area with common characteristics and facing a shared emergency, instead of splitting it among different continents. The Report states: "During the 21st century, climate change is projected to intensify throughout the region. Air and sea temperature and their extremes (notably heat waves) are likely to continue to increase more than the global average [...] Precipitation will likely decrease in most areas by 4–22%, depending on the emission scenario. Rainfall extremes will likely increase in the northern part of the region. Droughts will become more prevalent in many areas. [...] Mediterranean Sea level is projected to rise further during the coming decades and centuries (high confidence), likely reaching 0.15–0.33 m in 2050 [...]. Higher values cannot be excluded and the process is irreversible at the scale of centuries to millennia. [...] The adaptive capacity of ecosystems and human systems is expected to encounter hard limits due to the interacting, cumulative and cascading effects of droughts, heat waves, sea level rise, ocean warming and acidification."⁴

Desertification keeps on expanding, above and below water. From these amphibious perspectives, we see how the Ocean and the hydrosphere figure a continuum of constant interaction with dry lands, rather than a dichotomy. This understanding invites us to reshape and adapt our narratives, to think with the desert as a place of resilience and adaptation that responds to its ebbing reserves of freshwater, instead of a barren space, devoid of life and inhabitants, that needs to be forcibly regreened, repopulated, and made "productive"? Scholar Samia Henni calls for a fight against the so-called "regime of emptiness,"⁵ the Eurocentric imagination of desert as inherently deprived, of life and knowledge alike. The empty desert trope responded to the needs of the historical colonial project, which continues to mutate its choreographies of exploitation, extraction, and erasure in contemporary times.⁶ Can an analysis of Mediterranean cases help us to recognize the impacts of geoengineering, and to identify neo-colonial continuities in the theory and practice of ecological modernization, while looking for nature-based solutions and micro-refuges?

"Desert and desertification are two key concepts that cut across the fields of philosophy, literature, ecology, politics, and the arts. Their identities are unstable, dynamic, unfixed, and sometimes contradictory, although they are major contemporary figures haunting our imaginaries and defining current politics in relation to ecology," write Ida Soulard, Abinadi Meza and Bassam El Baroni in their book *Manual for a Future Desert* (2022).⁷ With the help of artists, scholars, scientists, activists, and thinkers, this semester keeps on exploring the interconnections between wet ontologies and dry spaces, trying to frame a vision that fits both the desert and the Ocean, projecting this key relationship into a collective space of research. We aim to bring specific visions – both highly localized and planetary – onto shared ground, where aridity is felt as a space of possibility for our common futures.

¹ The title is borrowed from the incipit of a poem by Andrée Chédid, Egyptian-French poet and novelist who lived between 1920 and 2011. See: Andrée Chédid, "Imagine", 1968, in *Textes pour un poème*, Flammarion, 2014, p. 259. Translated into English by Kamal Boullata in *Women of the Fertile Crescent: An Anthology of Modern Poetry by Arab Women*, Kamal Boullata (ed.), Three Continents Press, 1978, p. 7.

² Visit EX NUNC's website [HERE](#).

³ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a body of the United Nations created in 1988, aims to advance scientific knowledge about climate change caused by human activities. It coordinates global research efforts and informs governments about the possible natural, economic, and social impacts and risks of climate change, also covering possible response options. Between 1990 and 2022, the IPCC has published six comprehensive assessment reports (AR), the last of which (AR6) will be completed in the Spring of 2023 with the publication of the synthesis report.

⁴ For the full in-depth report on the Mediterranean region see: IPCC, AR6, WG2, Cross-chapter 4 "Mediterranean Region" (pp. 2235 - 2256). Accessible online [HERE](#).

⁵ Samia Henni (ed.), *Deserts are not Empty*, New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2022

⁶ On these topics, see: Diana K. Davis, *Of Deserts and Decolonization: Dispelling Myths About Drylands*, The MIT Press Reader, 2020 Accessible online [HERE](#).

⁷ Ida Soulard, Abinadi Meza and Bassam El Baroni (ed.), *Manual for a Future Desert*, Nantes: Mousse Publishing, 2021. The introduction is accessible online [HERE](#).

// PROGRAM

Wednesday, February 1, 6 pm CET

Session 1: **Prologue: For Future Deserts (and Seas)**

Keynote Speaker: **Bassam El Baroni**, Curator and Researcher, Aalto University, Helsinki

Wednesday, February 8, 6 pm CET

Session 2: **Building Utopia: Geoengineering, Megastructures, and Colonialities in the Mediterraneans**

Guests: **Design Earth**, research practice, founded by Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy in 2010

More TBA

February 15: 1st ACTIVATION

Wednesday, February 22, 6 pm CET

Session 3: **Dismantling Mythologies of Emptiness: Against Politics of Erasure and Extinction**

Guests: **Jumana Manna**, Visual Artist;

Samia Henni, Historian, Instructor and Exhibition Maker, Cornell University

March 1: 2nd ACTIVATION

Wednesday, March 8, 6 pm CET

Session 4: **Hadean Breath: Healing, Toxicity and Geothermalism in Turkey's Aegean Region**

Guests: **Aslı Uludağ**, Visual Artist, PhD candidate at Goldsmiths, University of London;

M. Cihat Alçiçek, Professor of Geology at Pamukkale University

March 15: 3rd ACTIVATION

Wednesday, March 22, 6 pm CET

Session 5: **New Populations at Sea: Interspecies Communities and Extractivism in the Adriatic**

Guests: **Isabelle Carbonell**, sci-fi documentary filmmaker;

Tjaša Kogovšek, Marine Ecologist, Ruđer Bošković Institute · Center for Marine Research

March 29: 4th ACTIVATION

Wednesday, April 5, 6 pm CET

Session 6: **Imagining Mediterranean Futures: Beyond the Wet / Dry Divide**

Guests: **Bochra Taboubi**, Visual Artist;

Islam Shabana, Visual Artist;

Zeina Moneer, PhD in Environmental Politics at Freiburg University, Researcher at Suez Canal University

Guests are present live on Zoom. All times in CET.

// WHO CAN PARTICIPATE & REGISTRATION

The program is intended for anyone eager to deepen their relations with the ecological, political, aesthetic, ethical, and scientific knowledges around the realities and futures of the Ocean. Lectures will be held in English, so a good listening and speaking level is recommended to ensure meaningful exchange.

Participants are required to register for their attendance to the program online via Zoom. Due to limited capacity applicants will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis. You are welcome to register in advance for more than one session. If you attend five sessions or more, you will receive an official certificate of attendance.

REGISTRATION FORM [HERE](#)

Access to the detailed program, session recordings, and additional study materials are provided through the ocean comm/uni/ty platform. These can be found in the OCEAN / UNI area.

JOIN OCEAN COMM/UNI/TY [HERE](#)

// ACTIVATIONS

The Activations that will unfold throughout this semester are conceived as a continuous series of workshops specifically developed by [QANAT](#) collective (Morocco/Palestine). More detailed information and the sign up procedure will be announced contextually with the Prologue on the 1st of February.

"**Mediterraneans: 'Thus waves come in pairs' (after Etel Adnan)**," the first stream of **The Current III** cycle is led by Barbara Casavecchia. "Thinking of, and with, the historical and cultural formation of the Mediterranean, trying to define and configure it, we are struck by the necessity to overcome not only disciplinary and national borders (and here the challenge of cultural and postcolonial studies come forcibly into play), but also to disorient and reorient the epistemological coordinates that we are used to applying," write Iain Chambers and Marta Cariello in their recent essay "The Mediterranean Question." How to rethink the divisions between land and water, wet and dry, solid and volatile by listening to the different languages and stories narrating them across time and space? Collaborative processes of care can co-construct future visions of the Mediterranean and its incessant flows of people, energy, resources, interactions, and currents, as well as support regenerative actions to manifest them.

The Current III "Mediterraneans: 'Thus waves come in pairs'", is a Decade Action part of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021–2030.

Fundación TBA21—based in Madrid and Vienna, with situated projects in Venice and Cordoba—is a leading international art and advocacy foundation created in 2002 by the philanthropist and collector Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza. All activity of the foundation is fundamentally driven by artists and the belief in art and culture as a carrier of social and environmental transformation and change. TBA21 is continually extending its advocacy work by sparking new collaborations across the arts, humanities and sciences, partnering with other research and educational organizations, and municipalities and communities around the world.

In 2011, TBA21 established the research center **TBA21–Academy**, a cultural ecosystem fostering a deeper relationship to the Ocean through the lens of art to inspire care and action. For a decade, the Academy has been an incubator for collaborative research, artistic production, and new forms of knowledge by combining art and science. In 2019, TBA21–Academy inaugurated **Ocean Space in Venice**, a planetary center for exhibitions, research, and public programs catalyzing critical ocean literacy through the arts, and **Ocean-Archive.org**, a digital organism for a living ocean; a platform in the making, an archive and framework for collaborative research.

Ocean-Archive.org is an online platform that investigates the potential of storytelling and transdisciplinary collaboration within and beyond archival practices. It strives to expand critical ocean literacy in a time of great necessity and catalyzes collective action for a living Ocean. The aim of Ocean-Archive.org is to bring together the multitude of voices and [Stories](#) around the Ocean and connect those striving to nurture and protect it. With [ocean.comm/uni/ty](#), the platform aligns conversations around the Ocean so that the members can find each other, connect, and join forces. Designed as a storytelling and pedagogical tool, Ocean-Archive.org translates current knowledge into a shared language that fosters synergy among art, science, policy, and conservation and enables us to make better decisions for urgently needed policies.