

OPEN CALL OCEAN / UNI

CULTURING THE DEEP SEA

TOWARDS A COMMON HERITAGE FOR ALLKIND

October 11 – December 6, 2023

Biweekly live sessions and activations

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

OCEAN / UNI is an initiative dedicated to art, activism, and science that invites fluid thinking with the Ocean as a way to move beyond the binaries of land and sea. OCEAN / UNI's curriculum provides students, researchers, and the public access to wide-ranging ideas and explorations through regular live sessions, reading groups, small-scale workshops or activations, and other online material, free and accessible to everyone on [Ocean-Archive.org](https://ocean-archive.org)

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 Fall semester of **OCEAN / UNI 2023** is curated by **Pietro Consolandi**, OCEAN / UNI Research Lead; **Mekhala Dave**, Ocean Law & Policy Researcher; **Fiona Middleton**, Research and Community; **Khadija Stewart**, Environmentalist; in dialogue with Artist and Curator **Taloi Havini**; and developed alongside **Aleksandra Czerniak**, Digital Project & Transformation Manager; **Michal Kučerák**, Head of Digital Researcher; **Petra Linhartová**; Director of Digital & Innovation; and **Markus Reymann**, Director of TBA21. Graphic design: **Lana Jerichová**.

Produced with care by the TBA21–Academy team.



CULTURING THE DEEP SEA
TOWARDS A COMMON HERITAGE FOR
ALLKIND

// FALL SEMESTER 2023

Between **October and December 2023, OCEAN / UNI will dive towards the deep sea**, adopting a cross-disciplinary lens to think from the furthest spaces of our planet's expansive bodies of water.

By interrogating the idea of the deep sea as a commons and a space of shared value, easily translatable to economic wealth and benefits, the Fall semester works to re-state the deep sea as a living reality saturated with meaning and foundational to life itself: as a metaphor for the unknown, a place where exciting creatures flourish and meaning sprouts, now threatened by the sharpening shadow of deep-sea mining. This new exploration and mining frontier is a horizontal one, thousands of meters below the sea surface and portrayed by extractivists as a "potato field" or "underwater desert", ready to be harvested for the common good. Yet, the deep ocean and the seabed are rich with diverse and unknown life, thriving around vents, ridges, plains, and seamounts.

The more-than-human eyes, arms, and minds entangled within deep-sea industry are not only creaturely, but robotic: unmanned remote controlled vehicles ready to thresh the seabed, or even handpick individual nodules.¹ The mining industry presents this post-human vision as less invasive and technologically infallible, plunging to the deepest depths to reach the greatest entrepreneurial heights. Despite the continued innovation of new technologies, the resourcification² of the deep sea only replicates centuries-old modes and models of exploitation within a "very particular vision of planetary management", with the Ocean at the forefront of this fight for a new approach to ecosystem management and planetary governance at large.³

Framing the fight against this renewed extractivist assault upon one of the four global commons from an interdisciplinary, culture-led approach, we want to assemble a diverse front that takes an affective, community-led approach to care and custodianship of the deep seas. Cultural relations with the deep seabed make it so much more than a "common heritage of mankind" to be partitioned and extracted from to provide short-term profit for a small number of humans, as is the likely outcome from deep-sea mining. What would it take to maintain a thriving deep sea and seabed, and ultimately a future in which the Earth remains a liveable planet for allkind?

Through a series of 5 live online lectures and interactive "activations" held with diverse speakers—from scientists to artists, from lawyers and policymakers to activists and Indigenous leaders—*Culturing the Deep Sea: Towards*

a common heritage for allkind aims to think around the constructions and representations that shape human–Ocean relations, and look to art and critical thinking to raise alternatives. Through collective unlearning as a radical act of deep ocean literacy, we hope to empower ourselves as a community to intervene in dynamic decision-making environments around deep-sea mining that proceed alongside the program.

// METHODOLOGY

[Culturing the Deep Sea](#), TBA21–Academy's program dedicated to exploring the narratives and intricacies around deep-sea mining, is expanding into **two cycles of OCEAN / UNI** developed in deep dialogue with artist and curator **Taloi Havini**. At the same time, our online learning initiative turns attention to TBA21–Academy's ongoing ocean advocacy at and around the **International Seabed Authority**. Through live sessions and focussed workshops, our curriculum approaches the looming threat of **deep-sea mining** from a perspective that accounts for local communities in oceanic regions—specifically Pacific and Caribbean—and more-than-human life at the seabed and within the water column.

To do so, we will adopt a place-based approach, aiming to "ground" both the concept of the deep sea and the speculative nature of deep-sea mining which, as of yet, remains fictional. By **focussing on one prospective mining site each session**, the discussion crosses oceans and continents to hear from those on the front lines: of ecological destruction, of regulation, and knowledge of the deep ocean. Session guests unfold a theme linked to the history or situation around that site, forming a chorus of voices and building a body of critical knowledge.

Inspired by artist and curator Taloi Havini's methodology of call and response, Latai Taumoepeau's artistic and activist practice, and the central importance of listening and dialoguing in Pacific cultures. In **Fall 2023** we will focus on narrative- and strategy-building, centering on scientific analysis and ongoing political discourse. Flanking the main sessions, we will develop a number of separate moments for communal study and discussion, making space for **activations** developed to critically reflect on deep sea and deep-sea mining. In **Spring 2024**, we will open up to activism and resistance strategies, especially in the Pacific, aiming to bring strength to an existing global network. This process will be enriched by a series of activations developed in collaboration with **Tactical Tech**, aiming to collectively shape tools to create a meaningful sense of agency, engage and influence the decision making process related to extractivism and ecology.

¹ For reference, see the technologies proposed by [The Metals Company](#) and [Impossible Metals](#).

² See Johan Hultman et al., "A resourcification manifesto: Understanding the social process of resources becoming resources", in *Research Policy*, vol. 50 n. 9, 2021. [Accessible online](#).

³ See Irus Braverman, "Robotic Life in the Deep Sea", in *Blue Legalities: The Laws and Life of the Sea*, pp.147-164, Duke University Press, 2020.

// PROGRAM

The program begins with a Prologue on October 1, 2023, which introduces the ideas and approaches of the curriculum. These are unfolded through five overarching themes presented during the main **sessions**, which take place every other Wednesday. Five corresponding "**activations**" (small interactive workshops in which participants are invited to engage and respond) are offered to deepen the understanding of stories, case studies, and methodologies from the main sessions. For the first semester, the activations will revolve around two formats: reading groups around relevant texts, and workshops aiming to develop a critical discourse around the deep sea. The program will be announced in September, and due to limited capacity, the registrations will open on the ocean comm/uni/ty one week in advance.

Guests and detailed program to be announced in September 2023.

All sessions are live on zoom on Wednesdays at 6pm CET
Recordings will be made available on [Ocean-Archive.org](https://ocean-archive.org).

» October 11, 2023

Session 1: **Prologue: Towards a common heritage for allkind**

[#Ocean care](#) [#justice](#) [#governance](#) [#action](#)
[#Pacific worldview](#) [#hydrofeminism](#) [#multibeing](#)

Keynote speaker: Susan Reid, Environmental philosopher, writer, artist, and ocean lawyer. Collaborating researcher with the University of Sydney's 'Extracting the Ocean' project.

In our Prologue, adopting a planetary point of view on issues of justice and governance in oceanic spaces, we meet the concept of multibeing justice for the Ocean and envision ways to realize it. When the deep Ocean is a place that largely remains an idea, how can geographic and conceptual distance be overcome? How do we approach law as a media, critically assessing its sedimented principles, and using cultural practices to directly involve the Ocean as a collaborator rather than an object? Data, stories, space for thought: perhaps taken together, the deep sea can come to matter. Taking inspiration from art and humanities, law and policymaking, and leaning towards Indigenous and activist practices, we will dive into a far-reaching Prologue that sets the tone for the upcoming program.

» October 18, 2023

Activation 1: reading group centered on "[Blue Legalities: The Laws and Life of the Sea](#)", ed. Irus Braverman, Elizabeth R. Johnson

» October 25, 2023

Session 2: **A remote commons: Deep-sea mining and redesigning common heritage**

[#Deep-sea mining](#) [#commons](#)

[#common heritage of humankind](#) [#extractivism](#)

Speakers: Irus Braverman, professor of law and an adjunct professor of geography at the University at Buffalo; More TBC

The deep seabed is legally designated as the "common heritage of mankind" after the proposal of Maltese ambassador Arvid Pardo in 1967.⁴ After decades of hedging bets, legal deliberation, and renders of robot mining machines, humans in 2023 seem on the verge of commercial extraction from these commons. With a glance to other industries already exploiting the deep, we will deepen the key issues around the possibility of mining the seabed, and explore the diverse activist movement that resists such ventures and fights for a common heritage beyond the category of mankind, that takes into account all marine creatures, recognising their inextricable connections with all life, of which humans are only one of many forms.

» November 1, 2023

Activation 2

October 30 to November 8, 2023:
28TH SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SEABED
AUTHORITY, COUNCIL MEETING

» November 8, 2023

Session 3: **Washing the Sea in Green and Blue: Mineral solutions for energy transition?**

[#Greenwashing](#) [#bluewashing](#) [#energy](#) [#extractivism](#)
[#degrowth](#) [#inequality](#)

Speakers: TBC

The main arguments made for deep-sea mining revolve around its capacities to reduce the relentless social, ecological, and supply pressures felt at mining sites on land. But which frames and metrics are used to delimit the "lightest planetary touch"⁵ its proponents claim of underwater mining technology, and what social costs are being left out of the discussion? Matters of closeness and distance, scale, calculation, and the need for plurality in this debate come together as we pull apart tightly woven narratives.

» November 15, 2023

Activation 3

» November 22, 2023

Session 4: **Deep Theater: The International Seabed Authority as a performative space**

[#International Seabed Authority](#) [#ocean governance](#)
[#planetary politics](#)

Speakers: Pradeep Singh, expert on ocean governance, the law of the sea, environmental law, climate policy and public international law, Research Institute for Sustainability

⁴ Arvid Pardo, statement before the Plenary of the 22nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, October 1, 1967. Transcript [available online](#).

⁵ Former CEO of The Metals Company Gerard Barron indicated this to be the case with DSM, see Dino Grandoni, "Scientists detected 5,000 sea creatures nobody knew existed. It's a warning.", in The Washington Post, 2023. [Accessible online](#).

Potsdam;
More TBC

Since 2017, TBA21–Academy has had the privilege to be the only arts & culture initiative granted an observer status at the UN's International Seabed Authority (ISA). In this session, we will reflect on the dynamics of a governing body that has the power to rule over decisions related to the deep seabed beyond national jurisdiction. What dynamics are at play, and what flows of information direct the actions of nation states, NGOs and corporations? What's at stake on and off this planetary stage, and where are spaces for intervention?

» November 29, 2023

Activation 4

» December 6, 2023

Session 5: **Ocean as Library of Ideas: Complex systems at sea**

[#Marine genetic resources](#) [#complex systems](#)
[#deep-sea imagination](#) [#Pacific worldviews](#)

Speakers: Stacy Alaimo, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies for English, Core Faculty Member for Environmental Studies, University of Oregon;
More TBC

In our last session we float into realms of oceanic thinking around marine richness, fueling our thoughts towards the next semester—to be more explicitly rooted in place-based activism. The labeling of adaptations or abilities of marine creatures as "marine genetic resources", and the intellectual property regime that follows, conjure conversation about the value of knowledge and the desires that feed human feelings and designs for the Ocean. What is happening under the water's surface, and how can it inspire thought and action? How does the Ocean show us the inherent interconnectedness of our biosphere, and how can its teachings be implemented in human and posthuman knowledge structures? By approaching the Ocean as a library of ideas, we hope to conclude the semester with inspiration and an open outlook on how to work with the Ocean through cross-disciplinary practices.

» December 13, 2023

Activation 5

// 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. 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](#)

As the online portal to access the ongoing and past programs of OCEAN / UNI, **ocean comm/uni/ty** platform harbors collaboration and offers a space for researchers, practitioners, and ocean lovers of all stripes to exchange knowledge and seek inspiration; to share and promote their work; to spark and maintain collaborations. Past semesters can be found in the OCEAN / UNI space [HERE](#).

ocean comm/uni/ty is a feature of the Ocean-Archive.org, a user-friendly meeting place for diving deep and crossing disciplines. In concert with OCEAN / UNI and Ocean-Archive.org, ocean comm/uni/ty forms an immersive three-pronged ecosystem for learning, discovering, and gathering.

// DEEP OCEAN LITERACY

The methodologies of OCEAN / UNI aim to create spaces of collaborative work, coalitional thinking,³ and solidarity to generate new pedagogies and ways of researching that go beyond words, grown from feeling. This sensitivity to the oceanic elaborates a critical ocean literacy that extends a factual comprehension of the mutual influence between us and the Ocean, moving deeper into thinking through the Ocean.

Performed individually and collectively, such acts can blend in different kinds of knowledge and release us from coded connections to wander through the ocean's rhythms, poetry, and biology; through these fluid processes of hybridization we might come to grasp and communicate our ecological crisis.

Learning through sensing, familiarity, and the body can ignite joy and healing, can grow affinity with otherness. Telling stories—and coming together to listen—can access cosmic timescales, can weave motives and planetary movements into the spaces between data points. How do the ways in which we talk to each other, gather, listen, and learn matter and create kinship? By welcoming worldviews originating in different densities and humidities, latitudes and altitudes, perhaps a new critical perspective could arise, one that can tell the story of the fragile interconnectedness of our biosphere, empowering humans and nonhumans to wade toward a space of balanced coexistence.

Imagine the deep sea. It seems not to move, to breathe, to live in the way we know under the Sun. The seeming strangeness of the "deep sea", typically defined as more than 200 meters deep, and the thickly mediated representations of its scenes render it hard to relate to. What's at stake on the seabed, Earth's last extractive frontier? In the open ocean, which creatures thrive throughout the water column? How can we speak to their livelihoods and connect our concerns for living in common?

Learning about the deep sea is the strongest tool we have to protect it: becoming "ocean literate" is not just a way to

³ Eva S. Hayward and Adela C. Licona, "Trans~Waters~ Coalitional Thinking on Art + Environment," terrain.org, 2014. [Accessible online.](#)

gather facts, but to gather power as an ocean citizen. As part of the preparation for the upcoming semester, you can already dive into a collection on [Ocean-Archive.org](https://ocean-archive.org) dedicated to Deep Ocean Literacy. It is meant as a research tool, open to your additions, on scientific exploration of the deep ocean; advocacy for deep ocean sustainability; extractive industries and activities; biodiversity at the seabed and the water column; and Pacific methodologies.

// RELATED OPPORTUNITIES FOR ocean comm/uni/ty MEMBERS

Call for OCEAN / UNI Journeys: *Culturing the Deep Sea: Towards a common heritage for allkind*

Along with participation in the sessions, we are commissioning texts to enrich the curriculum and add another perspective to the featured topics. Taking a place-based approach, this semester aims to "ground" both the concept of the seabed and the speculative nature of deep-sea mining, which, as of yet, remains fictional.

This is a call to OCEAN / UNI participants and ocean comm/uni/ty members who find any of the topics of this coming semester especially resonant and would like their writing to be featured on Ocean-Archive.org's Journeys page. See more details and directly apply via this [Google Form](#) no later than September 4, 2023.

Call for Ocean-Archive.org Digital Resident 2023/24: Thinking with the Deep Ocean

The upcoming semesters of OCEAN / UNI will adopt a cross-disciplinary lens to think from the remotest spaces of our expansive body of water. Through unlearning as a radical act of ocean literacy, we hope to empower ourselves as a community to intervene in dynamic decision-making environments around deep-sea mining that proceed alongside the program.

The Ocean-Archive.org **Digital Residency 2023/24** is thought to run alongside OCEAN / UNI, as an opportunity to realize a participatory project around the deep sea, exploring modes of "deep ocean literacy" rooted in artistic and design research approaches.

The Digital Resident will engage the ocean comm/uni/ty through live moments or calls for collaboration, producing a final work to be presented on Ocean-Archive.org's digital ecosystem.

We encourage projects that cross geographies and traditional disciplines to ask fresh questions about value, representations, and voices of the deep.

See more details and directly apply via this [Google Form](#) no later than October 1, 2023.

// WHO IS BEHIND OCEAN / UNI

TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary—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 [journeys](#) around the Ocean and connect those striving to nurture and protect it. With [ocean comm/uni/ty](#), the platform instigates conversations around the Ocean so that members can connect and co-create. 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.