



# Vulnerability

Panel Discussion

As part of CYFEST 15 International Media Art Festival

April 22, 2024, 17:00

Ca' Foscari, University of Venice

Aula Mario Baratto (Mario Baratto Conference Hall), 2nd Floor

Dorsoduro 3246



The panel will bring renowned thinkers and practitioners from the fields of Arts, Science, Technology, and Design to discuss the value of vulnerability.

Ursula le Guin wrote about the openness she thought was vital in creative work: “so that death finds me at all times, and on all sides exposed, unfortressed, undefended, inviolable, vulnerable, alive”.

Vulnerability may be thought of as meaning that one is at risk in a number of possible ways. One could be physically, emotionally, financially, or socially vulnerable, and it is natural to try to defend against falling into such a state. However, the barriers that are built to keep vulnerability at bay may also keep out other influences, sensations, ideas, relationships and possibilities.

In collaboration, it is vital to be open to possibilities that may unsettle or disturb habits, identity, and ways of engaging with the world. Holding on to established ideas, even ideas that have delivered success, advances in thinking and practice, and status, may limit or frustrate innovation. High performing teams can arise out of a culture that protects or even promotes vulnerability.

The 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights established the need to protect human dignity. How would it be to seek to protect our mutual vulnerability? In a time of climate emergency and mass biodiversity loss, could we consider extending this to the more than human world? For this to be possible, many other changes dealing with social and ecological justice would be necessary.

The panel will explore these and other aspects of vulnerability in Venice: a city that embodies a precarious, vulnerable position, whilst remaining a beacon of vibrant culture and contemporary arts and design.

### **Chair / Convenor**

Alan Boldon

### **Panel contributors**

**Alice Oswald**, celebrated poet and gardener

**Sha Xin Wei**, Director of Synthesis and Professor School of Arts, Media + Engineering at Arizona State University

**Muriel Mambrini-Doudet**, 1st Research Director, French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development, Doctoral program lead at the Learning Planet Institute

**Brian MacCraith**, Physicist, Senior Advisor to the President, Arizona State University (ASU); Chair, External Oversight Body of the Irish Defence Forces; Chair, Gaelic Players Association (GPA); Former President, Dublin City University (2010–2020)

**Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas**, artists, educators, and co-founders of *Urbonas Studio*, an interdisciplinary research practice for the transformation of civic spaces and collective imaginaries

### **Format**

5 minutes from each person

Chair questions

Audience questions

### **Duration**

90 min

### **Location**

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### **Speakers Biographies**

#### **Alan Boldon**

Alan Boldon is an artist, social entrepreneur, curator, public speaker and writer. He has held leadership roles in the arts, academia, charities and business and is known for pioneering initiatives that bridge the realms of education, culture, and sustainability. Alan has consistently pushed the boundaries of conventional thinking and practice to shape a more sustainable and regenerative future.

As a consultant he has advised senior teams in organisations, including many Universities, all around the world. In his most recent venture as founder and Director of *Weave* he is creating an

international network of bioregional learning labs exploring ways to engage with and solve complex challenges.

Alan is a sought after speaker for prestigious events worldwide. Notable contributions have been keynotes, workshops and public talks for organisations including: the UN General Assembly Science Summit; MIT; London School of Economics; Kiasma National Contemporary Arts Centre Helsinki; Bristol Old Vic; TATE; Nanyang Academy Singapore; Museum of New Mexico; Politecnico di Milano; San Francisco Art Institute; World Innovation Summit Education Qatar; UNESCO/Learning Planet Institute Paris; CAA Boston, New York and LA; the Academy of Urbanism; CYFEST, Armenia; Luxembourg City; Brighton Dome; the Hermitage St. Petersburg; British Council; UKTI; Malaysian Cultural Ministry; ASEAN EcoTourism Network; and the Royal Society of Arts.

### **Professor Gediminas and Professor Nomeda Urbonas, MIT and *Urbonas Studio***

Nomeda & Gediminas Urbonas are artists, educators, and co-founders of the *Urbonas Studio*, an interdisciplinary research practice that facilitates exchange amongst diverse nodes of knowledge production and artistic practice in pursuit of projects that transform civic spaces and collective imaginaries. Urbonas have exhibited internationally including the São Paulo (twice), Berlin, Moscow (twice), Lyon, Gwangju, Busan, Taipei Biennales, Folkestone and Baltic Triennials — and Manifesta and Documenta exhibitions — among numerous other international shows, including a solo show at the Venice Biennale, MACBA in Barcelona and National Gallery of Art in Vilnius. Their writing on artistic research as a form of intervention into social and political crisis was published in the books *Devices for Action* (2008) by MACBA Press, Barcelona and *Villa Lituania* (2008) by Sternberg Press, and *Public Space? Lost and Found* (2017) by MIT Press. Urbonases curated the *Swamp School* — future learning environment at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale 2018. The book *Swamps and the New Imagination: On the Future of Cohabitation in Art, Architecture and Philosophy* published by Sternberg Press and distributed by MIT Press, is forthcoming in 2024. Gediminas is Associate Professor at MIT's Program in Art, Culture and Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Nomeda is Research Affiliate at MIT.

### **Dr Muriel Mambrini, Soil Scientist**

Muriel Mambrini-Doudet, Ph.D., grounds science of science management for sustainable development. She alternates theory and practice: interdisciplinary research at the interface between life science, innovation management, and philosophy to frame a generic epistemology, simultaneously to the management of large research organizations crossing science, administration, and human dimensions. She is a former head of the largest research center of the national institute for agricultural research, former director of the Institute of Advanced Study for Science and Technology, current director of the Doctoral School for Interdisciplinary Frontier Research. Recently, she designed the framework serving the actors of the innovation ecosystems to accelerate the agroecological transition using the potential of living labs at national, European, and International levels. She sits at the board of the EU Soil Mission with the aim of engaging the transformations for soil health. Having identified for long that reforming the evaluation system of science quality is key, she just joined the French Institute of Research for Sustainable Development (IRD) as director of Research & Programs Evaluation, with the intent to shape evaluation processes fit for sustainable, open — and more vulnerable — science.

### **Professor Brian MacCraith MRIA FlinstP**

Professor Brian MacCraith is senior advisor to the President of Arizona State University (ASU). His responsibilities include the development of European initiatives, support for the University Design Institute, especially in the area of sustainability, and a Professor of

Practice position in the College of Global Futures. Prior to this ASU role, he was President of Dublin City University (2010–2020), during which time the university underwent major transformation and grew significantly in terms of scale, footprint, and reputation. He also pioneered a number of important developments in the area of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, including the establishment of the world's first Autism-friendly University. He has a strong commitment to innovation and inclusion in education at all levels. Professor MacCraith is internationally renowned for his research achievements in the areas of chemical and bio-sensor technology, photonics, and advanced materials. In 2020, he was appointed by the Irish government to lead the High-Level Task Force on COVID-19 Vaccination and to Chair of the *Future of Media Commission*. He is currently Chair of the *External Oversight Body* of the Irish Defence Forces.

### **Sha Xin Wei**

[Sha Xin Wei](#) Ph.D., Professor at the Schools of [Arts, Media + Engineering](#) and [Complex Adaptive Systems](#), directs the [Synthesis Atelier](#) for transversal art, philosophy, and technology at Arizona State University. He has been a Professor at Concordia University as director of the [Topological Media Lab](#), at the [European Graduate School](#), and the [New Centre for Research & Practice](#).

Sha's core research concerns processualist approaches to ontogenesis and poiesis. His art and scholarly work range from gestural media, movement arts, and realtime media installation through experiential design to critical studies and philosophy of technology. Sha has published in philosophy, media arts and sciences, experimental music and performance, science and technology studies, computer science, and human computer interaction, including the book [Poiesis and Enchantment in Topological Matter](#) (2013, MIT Press). He is an Associate Editor for AI & Society and serves on the Governing Board of Leonardo.

Sha's art includes the *TGarden* playspaces, *Hubbub* speech-sensitive urban spaces, *Softwear* gestural sound instruments, the *WYSIWYG* gesture-sensitive sounding weaving, and responsive kinetic/light sculptures such as *Membrane* (DEAF, Rotterdam), *Cosmicomics* (Elektra, Montreal), *eSea* (E-Arts Festival, Shanghai), time lenses such as the *IL Y A* video membrane and *Palimpsest* (Musée des arts et métiers, Paris), and in collaboration with Oana Suteu Khintirian, Todd Ingalls, and Ginette Laurin, the *Serra* vegetal life environment.

### **Alice Oswald**

Alice Oswald trained as a gardener and has published 7 books of poetry, including *Dart* — a documentary poem about the River Dart, and *Memorial* — a version of Homer's Iliad. She has a particular interest in oral traditions and teaches a course on imagination at Dartington Arts School in Devon, UK. She was the first female Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, and her books have been translated into several languages.

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