

Collegium Helveticum Annual Report 2024–2025

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Editorial

Size Follows Function

Each institution has to find the size that best fits its purpose. Sometimes, size is more of a constraint than a free parameter within a given system. In such cases, rather than striving for an ideal size in the abstract, it may be more productive to ask: *What is the best institutional strategy given the constraints on size?*

As evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane argued in his formative essay “On Being the Right Size,” there is an optimal scale for living organisms—a consideration he extended to human institutions: “Just as there is a best size for every animal, so the same is true for every human institution.”¹ In short, bigger is not always better, and small is not necessarily beautiful. For an institution to succeed, its size must align with its complex set of goals. In the following, we want to share some thoughts on size based on our experience and daily practice at the Collegium Helveticum.

The optimal size for something as complex as an institution with many interdependent constraints typically cannot be derived from first principles. More promising are thought experiments to navigate the complex optimization of institutions akin to evolutionary optimization, but obviously without the aspect of random change. Therefore, we ask what relevant properties of the system are affected positively or negatively when we increase or decrease size. In reality, size is often a parameter with limited freedom. So we may ask as well, given a particular size, what is the best form of the institution to achieve its goals. Referring back to Haldane, whether

it is an animal or institution, “there is a most convenient size, and a large change in size inevitably carries with it a change of form.”

Bigger may be better, sometimes

One of the core aims of the Collegium is to nurture exchange across all disciplines. Bigger could therefore be considered better, if one were to take a simplistic measure of interdisciplinarity based on the number of disciplines represented. More individuals, more disciplines, and thus more perspectives may increase the chances of finding one or more intellectual sparring partners. Bigger may also be better if upscaling serves as a buffer against fluctuations in funding, recruitment cycles, or participation rates. Some of these fluctuations do indeed matter in the everyday business of an institute. For instance, the participation of fellows in the common seminars at the Collegium is unusually high, but there are days when—typically for reasons beyond one’s control—there are fewer participants than desirable for an interdisciplinary discussion.

Advantages of being small

Large size, however, also has downsides. In particular, if the aim is to foster dialogue across *all* disciplines and amongst *all* fellows, then we know from experience that meaningful group discussions are only possible below a certain threshold in size. One can debate concrete numbers, but the threshold is certainly closer to twenty than to fifty. Mutual learning declines beyond a certain group size due to a decrease in opportunities for meaningful exchange. In turn, the cohesion of the group typically increases in smaller groups, also because individuals are more likely to identify with the community. In addition, a smaller group affords lower

¹ Haldane, J.B.S., “On Being the Right Size,” *Harper’s Magazine*, March 1926: 424–427.

“The Collegium is one of the rare places where meaningful discourse across academic fields and disciplinary boundaries is actually taking place.”



Reto Geiser
Architecture
Senior Fellow 2024–2025



Fellowship year 2024–2025

coordination and communication costs which result in more dynamic and informal exchange. For individuals, the required social budget for time and attention remains balanced in a smaller group. In many instances, the division of labor may increase quality and productivity, however in the case of an institute nurturing the interdisciplinary exchange between its members, functional differentiation may ultimately translate to a loss in diversity of perspectives.

Institutes of advanced study, such as the Collegium Helveticum, also function as a “lighthouse” and contribute to international visibility and lasting academic networks. Clearly, there is hence a critical minimal size below which this mission cannot be fulfilled. To carry the weight of the Collegium in its current form, we believe that a size of around eight to ten early-career fellows and around ten to fifteen senior fellows constitute the necessary minimum size.

Multiple goals, no single metric

Any institution like the Collegium pursues multiple, potentially conflicting, goals. It is not only for this reason that one single quantitative measure cannot determine its optimal size. Instead we seek to strike a balance: The number of fellows should be large enough to allow for diversity and independence, yet small enough for cohesion, interaction, and informal governance. In order to facilitate freedom and independence, the

number of rules should be kept to a minimum,² again something that works better in smaller groups.

One question we ask ourselves on a daily basis is how to achieve multiple goals for the individual fellows, the community of fellows, and the Collegium as the institution. We aim to provide ideal conditions in a less than ideal world. In our experience, this challenge is easier to manage with a smaller group of individuals. Individuals and institutions alike often have multiple, occasionally diverging, and sometimes even conflicting interests. Thus far, we have been fortunate with the fellows at the Collegium. However, we all have seen how individual career interests can develop centrifugal dynamics that, in turn, can challenge the cohesion of a group. We take it as one of our tasks to balance all legitimate interests, emphasize shared benefits at both the individual and community level, and try to align them with the Collegium’s goals.

A small, highly interdisciplinary environment may not fulfill a fellow’s need for disciplinary feedback. For this reason both early-career and senior fellows have an associate fellow as a local partner from one of the three supporting universities. This enables the international fellows to establish channels of exchange with local experts in their fields. Navigating both internal and external exchange requires that we keep commitments at the Collegium for individuals as low as possible, yet as high as necessary for meaningful engagement. Even modest participation can make an individual fellow more visible and compelling, enhancing both professional and personal opportunities. Engaging with peers

² Lorraine Daston, *Rules: A Short History of What We Live By* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022); Lorraine Daston, “Why Not Just One More Rule?,” in *Über das Kolleg hinaus: Joachim Nettelbeck dem Sekretär des Wissenschaftskollegs 1981 bis 2012*, edited by Mamadou Diawara, Klaus Günther, and Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus (Berlin: Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, 2012), 61–64.

strengthens the community while also raising individual profiles: After all, being seen as an “interesting” colleague often begins with showing genuine interest in others. Therefore, a key goal remains the fostering of exchange among fellows, which depends on creating a density of informal, face-to-face interaction. To this end, we take a bottom-up approach, entrusting certain responsibilities to fellows while avoiding too much work.

Creative use of constraints

In our experience at the Collegium over the past few years, we have encountered functional constraints of scale. Selectivity is an unavoidable constraint. While we aim to keep the Collegium and its programs open to all qualified scholars and artists as fellows, limited resources require selection. One difficult reality is that we cannot support every fellowship application or request to organize an event, even if we wished to. Each year, we receive far more strong applications and intriguing requests than we can accommodate. Our hope is that the careful assessment of applications rises to the level of the quality of the applicants and regret that, despite our best efforts, we cannot meet the expectations of all.

We firmly believe in the importance of a shared space for meaningful exchange between fellows, and we feel privileged to host both fellows and guests in a unique building. The very existence of the Collegium is tied to the Semper Observatory, which has been its home ever since it was adapted to house the Collegium. ETH Zurich has invested both funding and effort into transforming the former observatory into a space for interdisciplinary collaboration. This includes not only dedicated office spaces, a seminar room, and a mid-sized lecture hall, but also various social spaces for informal exchange—such as a kitchen, a small library, and informal seating areas. In 2020, dedicated exhibition spaces were added which we encourage fellows to use.

However, any built environment creates boundary conditions that are also an important aspect of the community it can accommodate. For instance, the historic Semper Observatory cannot offer lab or studio space for all projects. It would not have been feasible to add such spaces. Therefore, we provide time for fellows to work up to forty percent of their weekly working hours outside the Collegium if the success of their project is contingent on additional infrastructure. In similar ways, we organize some events in cooperation with other institutions across the campuses and the city. This strategy allows us to make the best use of the premises of the Collegium while opening the program to audiences we would otherwise not reach.

Another constraint is to keep the administration small enough to operate efficiently but large enough to ensure smooth operation. The effort to shape a new program and establish a shared trajectory resulted in a high workload for a small and exceptionally motivated team. We now feel the Collegium has found its direction and acknowledge that a sustainable work environment for the team requires a small increase in staffing. Looking ahead, we aim to move toward a more balanced model of shared responsibility and continue to develop a supportive, collaborative culture, all while preserving clear direction and avoiding reinvention.

Conclusion: Start small and aim for modest growth

The Collegium is in the privileged situation of being supported by three leading universities and benefits greatly from cooperation with faculty and the additional infrastructure the Collegium can make accessible. Rather than chasing an abstract ideal, our approach was adaptive and began with the size that offered the best possible working conditions and was feasible within the budget. Based on feedback and experience, we, almost on a daily basis, discussed improvements and adjustments in structure, coordination, and communication, always taking directives based on a bottom-up approach and feedback.

Much has been said about the greatness of institutes for advanced study, but little about their size. Looking back to the early days of the first institute for advanced study, it was envisioned by its founders as small in size and simple in structure.³ For us, this means maintaining a small to mid-sized structure while designing systems and spaces that maximize interaction, diversity, and a shared sense of ownership. The number of fellows should—if not with every cohort but over time—represent the full breadth of disciplines at the supporting universities. This is important for the inclusive approach we pursue. Paradoxically, the wider the interdisciplinary scope of the fellowship program, the smaller the ideal number of fellows at any one time—around twenty to twenty-five. Ultimately, one of the main goals is to create a space for face-to-face interaction and to maximize the amount of unobscured time and shared space for fellows to explore new orientations.

Intellectual greatness ultimately is a relative measure. In times when so-called excellence no longer serves as a distinguishing feature and higher learning grows into virtual space, small places of being and thinking together have become more important than ever. In this shared spirit, the Collegium has started a partnership with the NOMIS Foundation. This partnership allows for the establishment of a new type of fellowship for distinguished scholars. The additional support of the NOMIS Foundation will allow us to continue the program and meet the highest standards also in the future. In line with the argumentation of this editorial, our aim with this partnership is not to expand in size, but to enhance the overall quality of the program. Further improving the attractiveness of the fellowships for outstanding academics and artists will allow us to achieve key goals of the Collegium: offering a space for exchange beyond disciplinary boundaries and creating a lasting international academic network.

As a closing note, we are deeply saddened to share the passing of Mario Biagioli, Hans Danuser, and Pius August Schubiger, three valued members of the Collegium community of former fellows. We remain grateful for their contributions to the Collegium and will continue to remember their presence at the observatory.

Sebastian Bonhoeffer
Director

Mario Wimmer
Deputy Director

3 Abraham Flexner, “The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge,” *Harper’s Magazine*, June/November 1939: 544–552. See <https://www.ias.edu/sites/default/files/library/UsefulnessHarpers.pdf> (last access: October 17, 2025).

Fellows First

As Swiss Institute for Advanced Study, supported by ETH Zurich, the University of Zurich, and the Zurich University of the Arts, the Collegium Helveticum puts its fellows first. The Collegium's fellowship program offers academics and artists an inspiring and international environment in the historic Semper Observatory, where they can exchange ideas across disciplines and pursue their individual projects.

As members of the Collegium community, fellows are actively involved in academic life and have ample opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogue around their projects. The Collegium offers three main fellowship types: early-career fellows are postdoctoral researchers or art school graduates at an equivalent stage in their career; senior fellows are established artists or academics visiting one of the three supporting institutions; sabbatical-at-home fellows are faculty members of the three supporting institutions who become part of the Collegium while remaining at their home institution in Zurich for their sabbatical. In addition, all of these fellows collaborate with an associate fellow. As faculty members at one of the supporting institutions, associate fellows support the fellowship application of early-career and senior fellows, help the international fellows establish contacts in Zurich, and often provide access to additional research-related infrastructure.

“My most memorable moment was visiting the vast construction site of the new University Hospital, a trip organized by by Senior Fellow Reto Geiser. Standing deep underground, surrounded by concrete and machinery, I was struck by how coordinating so many different skills, perspectives, and knowledges was essential to meet the project’s complexity. From an academic and professional viewpoint, it was inspiring to see diverse expertise come together to achieve excellence while upholding a strong commitment to sustainability.”



Bjørn Hofmann
Philosophy of medicine and bioethics
Senior Fellow 2024–2025



Spotlight Navigating Complexity

Early-Career Fellows Researchers and Artists From Diverse Backgrounds

Early-career fellows are researchers and artists working in academic or artistic disciplines at a postdoctoral or an equivalent level for art school graduates (up to five years of “academic age” after completing their PhD or highest degree in the arts). In the 2024–2025 fellowship year, the Collegium was able to support nine fellows from diverse backgrounds, coming from both international and Swiss universities. Early-career fellows are employed as postdocs at ETH Zurich during their ten-month fellowships. They are free to pursue their individual projects as proposed in their applications. In addition, they convene a meeting, organize an event, or make use of the Collegium’s exhibition spaces, thereby making an independent contribution to the academic and artistic program at the Collegium Helveticum that reaches out to and engages different audiences.





Bronte Alexander

Political geography
Born 1992 in Darwin, AU
PhD: Griffith University, AU (2022)

Bronte Alexander is a political geographer specializing in the intimate and everyday experiences of mobility in humanitarian zones and migrant settlement contexts. Her research explores how everyday im/mobilities interact with overarching systems of governance and the human security implications for people experiencing marginalization based on gender, class, race, citizenship, and sexuality. Bronte's first monograph, titled *Governing Migration and Mobility* (2025, Bristol University Press), examines the ongoing humanitarian intervention at the Brazil-Venezuela border, highlighting how increasing reliance on militarized infrastructure to support humanitarian efforts ends up reproducing harm for migrants and refugees.

Associate fellow: Annuska Derks
Professor of Social Transformation Processes,
University of Zurich

Fellowship project

Queer Migrant Mobilities Mapping Everyday Bordering and Belonging

In her project at the Collegium, Bronte undertook an exploratory study of the everyday experiences of LGBTIQ+ migrants in Australia. Most migration research does not adequately attend to the intersectional dimensions regarding settlement, especially as they relate to diverse genders and sexualities. This project sought to further understand personal experiences in public spaces, examining where people felt safe being themselves and conversely at risk of harm or socially excluded. Key findings indicate that queer-friendly spaces were simultaneously sites of safety and exclusion, particularly for those whose race, ethnicity, and citizenship status was not represented or catered to. The study further highlighted the need to seriously consider the experiences of safety for LGBTIQ+ migrants who do not arrive on protection visas but for whom safety is nevertheless a significant factor in their journeys.

Roundtable, March 18, 2025

Contemplating (Dis)Comfort in Humanitarian Spaces

Attuned to the spatial dimensions of humanitarian intervention, including camps, shelters, transit centers, and hygiene facilities, this roundtable tackled the politics of providing care and comfort. It also brought together scholars across the disciplines of geography, architecture, design, international relations, and anthropology to ask whether the notion of comfort should be prioritized in emergency planning.

These scholars examined the difficulties of conceptualizing comfort, relating both to personal experience and the structural design of safety, privacy, and protection from thermal extremes. The intentional weaponization of discomfort in spaces of detention was discussed alongside the more unintentional or forgotten lack of comfort in spaces of care. The question of what this means for future state-supported humanitarian responses will be tackled in an essay co-authored by the roundtable participants.





Denise Bertschi

Visual, material, and spatial history

Born 1983 in Aarau, CH

PhD: Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL), CH (2023)

In her research, Denise Bertschi focuses on the visibility, materiality, and spatiality of Swiss colonial history. Studying archival materials, landscapes, and the built environment, she critically investigates the relational geographies between Switzerland, Brazil, Southern Africa, and Korea. In her doctoral thesis at EPFL's architecture department, she studied the enduring colonial entanglements between the former Colonia Leopoldina (1818–1894) in Bahia (Brazil) and Swiss plantation owners mainly from Neuchâtel (Switzerland).

In addition to her scholarly work, Denise's artistic work has been exhibited at various institutions, including Kunsthaus Zurich, the Swiss National Museum, Aargauer Kunsthaus, Het Nieuwe Instituut Rotterdam, Centre Culturel Suisse Paris, and the Art Sonje Center Seoul. She has published two award-winning monographs, *State Fiction* (2021) and *Strata: Mining Silence* (2020), co-edited the book *Unearthing Traces* (2023), and contributed to the edited volume *Researching Otherwise* (2024). As well as receiving residency grants by Pro Helvetia in South Africa, Los Angeles, and Brazil, Denise was also awarded the prestigious Manor Art Prize (2020).

Associate fellows:

Anselm Franke, Professor of Curatorial Studies, Zurich University of the Arts, CH

Philip Ursprung, Professor of the History of Art and Architecture, ETH Zurich

Publications during fellowship

Academic publications

Bertschi, D., and Zylbersztajn, P., eds. *Export Quality Poetry (1924–2024)*. Neuchâtel: Éditions CAN Center d'Art de Neuchâtel, 2024.

Bertschi, D. "Beobachtende 'Neutralität': Bildproduktion der Schweizerischen Delegation der Neutralen Überwachungskommission in Korea von 1953 bis 1980." In *Histoire Mondiale de la Suisse*, edited by David, T. Zurich: Hier und Jetzt Verlag, (forthcoming).

Films

Bertschi, D., dir. *Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry*. 30 min., 2025.

Bertschi, D., dir. *Neutrality as an Agent: Swiss Confidential*. 30 min., 2025.

Exhibitions

Bertschi, D. *Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry*. Solo show, June 13–July 11, 2025, Collegium Helveticum, Zurich.

Bertschi, D. *Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry*. Solo show, July 6–October 31, 2025, Kulturhaus Obere Stube (Jakob und Emma Windlerstiftung), Stein am Rhein, Zurich.

Modell Neutralität. Group show, February 1–May 11, 2025, Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau.

Bertschi, D., and Bartoletti, T. *Naming Natures: Natural History and Colonial Entanglement*, SNSF Agora exhibition, December 15, 2024–August 15, 2025, Muséum d'histoire naturelle de Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel.

Colonial: Switzerland's Global Entanglements. Thematic exhibition, September 13, 2024–January 19, 2025, Landesmuseum Zürich: Swiss National Museum, Zurich.

Bertschi, D. *Spatial Convers(i)or*. Solo show, September 21–November 10, 2024, CAN Centre d'Art Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel.

Media coverage and appearances

Reymond, I. "Die Natur benennen: Warum es wichtig ist, wer Tierarten den Namen gibt." SRF online, January 21, 2025.

"Spuren in Farbe." *Arttv*, July 22, 2025.

Fellowship project

Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry Dyes, Photography, and Architecture

During her time at the Collegium, Denise explored the intertwined histories of dye chemistry and photographic chemistry, situating them within ETH Zurich's institutional narrative and its industrial and colonial entanglements during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Bringing together material, architectural, and visual traces, the project wove a web of connections between chemical substances, scientific knowledge, and industrial and colonial histories in the formation of Swiss national identity.

Using the biographies of ETH chemistry professors Pompejus Bolley (1812–1870) and Robert Gnehm (1852–1926) as a lens, material traces from the chemistry of dyewood and photography were drawn upon to connect Zurich's urban and scientific landscape to its global entanglements with Brazil. Drawing on site-specific research, including the main building and chemistry building of ETH Zurich, Denise employed archival and aesthetic investigations to shed light on this history.

Workshop & exhibition, June 13 – July 11, 2025

Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry Dyes, Photography, and Architecture

This workshop explored methodologies of material culture in the writing of histories. Uniting perspectives from art, architecture, and history, it investigated matter as mediators to navigate transregional histories—entangling plants, lands, and (non-)human actors.

The event also marked the beginning of a solo exhibition by Denise Bertschi, which featured the film and textile artwork *Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry*. The essayistic film interweaves Denise's research into the ETH Zurich's University Archives and the ETH Chemistry Collections with the historical architecture of ETH Zurich, along material traces of brazilin from Brazilian dyewood. The textile artwork *Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry* features a 12-meter-long hand-dyed cotton banner colored with brazilin, an organic dye whose history traces back to the colonization of Brazil and that formed part of the research of ETH chemistry professors P. Bolley and R. Gnehm. This preprinted, textile picture atlas seeks to represent historical research in unconventional ways.





Ettore Camerlenghi

Evolutionary biology and ecology
Born 1990 in Bergamo, IT
PhD: Monash University, AU (2023)

Ettore Camerlenghi is an evolutionary biologist and ecologist interested in understanding how and why animals form cooperative relationships and how complexity arises from their social interactions. His research combines theoretical approaches with fieldwork to investigate the emergence of complex multilevel animal societies, where individuals form groups that are members of bands, and these bands are organized into clans—similar to most traditional human hunter-gatherer societies.

In his PhD dissertation, Ettore described the first known multilevel society of a songbird. To address his research questions, he applies hypotheses and theories from anthropology and primatology to birds, which he studies in both Australia and the Peruvian Amazon. Ettore is frequently involved in science communication and public outreach, contributing to documentaries, podcasts, and articles for science communication platforms, magazines, and newspapers such as *The Conversation*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, and *ABC*.

Associate fellow: **Damien Farine**
Professor of Social Evolutionary Ecology, University of Zurich

Publications during fellowship

Academic publication

Camerlenghi, E., Gálvez, D., Ketola, C., Piga, A., Holmes, N., ..., and Damas-Moreira, I. "Beyond predator and prey: First evidence of an association between ocelot and opossum individuals." *Ecosphere* 16, no. 6 (2025): e70322.

Ramellini, S., Nyaguthii, B., Camerlenghi, E., and Farine, D.R. "Linking non-breeding social behaviour with future territoriality costs." *Biological Reviews*, (accepted).

Camerlenghi, E., Parra, E., Novoa, J., Blumstein, D.T., Ponciano, J.M., and Martínez, A.E. "Small canopy species drive information highways about predators in an Amazonian rainforest." *Current Biology*, (under review).

Maune, L.A., Wittenbreder, T., Lisičić, D., Caspers, B.A., Camerlenghi, E., and Damas-Moreira, I. "City lizards are more social." *Biology Letters*, (under review).

Camerlenghi, E., Grueter, C.C., Migliano, A.B., Robinson, E.J.H., Fischer, J., ..., and Farine, D.R. "A conceptual guide to studying multilevel societies." (under submission).

Camerlenghi, E., and Ben Mocha, Y. "Humans sociality, convergent evolution and birds: A neglected link in evolutionary anthropology." (in preparation).

Media coverage and appearances

Brincat, C. "Videos From the Amazon Reveal an Unexpected Animal Friendship." *The New York Times* online, July 15, 2025.

Fellowship project

Drivers and Constraints to the Emergence of Complex Multilevel Societies in the Animal Kingdom

Our ability to form and maintain various types of social relationships—such as core family units, extended relations, and friendships with colleagues—is considered a key factor in human success. These different types of relationships together form what are known as "multilevel societies," providing us with close social partners, who are willing to invest in high-cost cooperative actions, as well as a broader network of social partners offering common goods. We know that multilevel societies exist in a range of other mammals beyond humans and are believed to represent the most complex social structures in vertebrates. This project aimed to develop hypotheses and predictions regarding the conditions that lead to the formation of multilevel societies throughout the animal kingdom.

Workshop, February 18–19, 2025

Drivers and Constraints in the Emergence of Multilevel Societies Toward a Unified Theory in the Animal Kingdom

With Cyril Grueter, Danai Papageorgiou, Damien Farine, Andrea Migliano, Elva Robinson, Julia Fischer, Lisa Ohrndorf, and Maurício Cantor.

This workshop brought together a select group of researchers with expertise in social complexity and multilevel societies across a range of animal taxa. The diverse group included specialists in social insects, birds, primates, humans, and other social mammals, including cetaceans. On the first morning—during the public session—each researcher presented and discussed what they saw as the main knowledge gap in the study of multilevel societies within their focal taxon. In the afternoon, during a closed-door session, participants explored commonalities across their research. The following day was dedicated to identifying ways to unify theory across taxa. The group concluded the workshop by outlining a draft structure for an article titled "A Conceptual Guide to Studying Multilevel Societies," which is under submission at the *Journal of Animal Ecology*.





Viktoria Cologna

Environmental psychology
Born 1995 in Bolzano, IT
PhD: ETH Zurich, CH (2021)

Viktoria Cologna is an environmental social scientist with a focus on environmental psychology. Her research investigates the determinants of individual and collective action on climate change, trust in science, and the role of science in society and policymaking. In her doctoral dissertation, Viktoria examined the role trust plays in climate change mitigation. Before joining the Collegium, she was a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University (US) and the Leibniz University Hannover (DE), and a postdoctoral researcher at ETH Zurich (CH) and the University of Zurich (CH).

She is currently a tenure-track group leader at the Department of Environmental Social Sciences at Eawag, the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, where she will continue her research on how behavioral responses can help mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Associate fellow: Mike Schäfer
Professor of Science Communication, University of Zurich

Publications during fellowship

Academic publications and reports

Cologna, V., Meiler, S., Kropf, C. M., Lüthi, S., Mede, N. G., ..., and TISP Consortium. "Extreme weather event attribution predicts climate policy support across the world." *Nature Climate Change* 15, no. 7 (2025): 725–735.

Ghasemi, O., Cologna, V., Mede, N. G., Stanley, S. K., Strahm, N., ..., and Schäfer, M. S. "Gaps in public trust between scientists and climate scientists: A 68 country study." *Environmental Research Letters* 20, no. 6 (2025): 061002.

Stanley, S. K., Ghasemi, O., Ross, R. M., Kerr, J. R., Marques, M. D., ..., and Cologna, V. "Anticipatory solastalgia in the Antipodes: Evidence of future-oriented distress about environmental change in Australia and New Zealand." *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* 23, (2025): 100415.

Mede, N. G., Cologna, V., Berger, S., Besley, J., Brick, C., ..., and TISP Consortium. "Public Communication about Science in 68 Countries: Global Evidence on How People Encounter and Engage with Information about Science." *Science Communication*, (accepted).

Scharfbillig, M., Allegra, A., Brossard, D., Cassio, L. G., Cologna, V., ..., and Wald, D. *Trust in Science for Policy Nexus. Workshop report, "Trust in Science for Policy," 12–13 September 2024, Ispra Italy.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025.

Media coverage and appearances

Rivara, S. "Measuring the temperature of science." *Horizons*, September 4, 2025.

"Zürcher Studie sieht keine Vertrauenskrise der Wissenschaft." *Swissinfo.ch*, January 20, 2025.

"Global Trust in Science Remains Strong." *UZH News*, January 20, 2025.

Weber, C. "Vertrauen in Wissenschaft weltweit grosser als gedacht – aber nicht unbedingt in Deutschland." *Süddeutsche Zeitung* online, January 20, 2025.

Krichmayr, K. "Österreichs Vertrauen in die Wissenschaft im globalen Vergleich eher niedrig." *Der Standard* online, January 20, 2025.

Fellowship project

Seeing Is Believing How Extreme Weather Event Experience and Media Attention Relate to Climate Policy Support

Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, leaving large shares of the global population at risk and resulting in high economic costs. As larger shares of the population experience extreme weather events, this may increase public perception of climate change and support for climate policies. It stands to reason that one important variable is whether or not people believe that the extreme weather event they have witnessed is attributable to climate change. The main research question underlying this interdisciplinary project was whether exposure to extreme weather events and attribution of these events to climate change influence public support for climate policies. To answer this question, Viktoria Cologna and her research partners used data from the TISP Many Labs study, as well as data on exposed populations provided by colleagues in the Weather and Climate Risks Group at ETH Zurich.

Panel discussion, June 3, 2025

Seeing Is Believing Extreme Weather Events and Climate Action

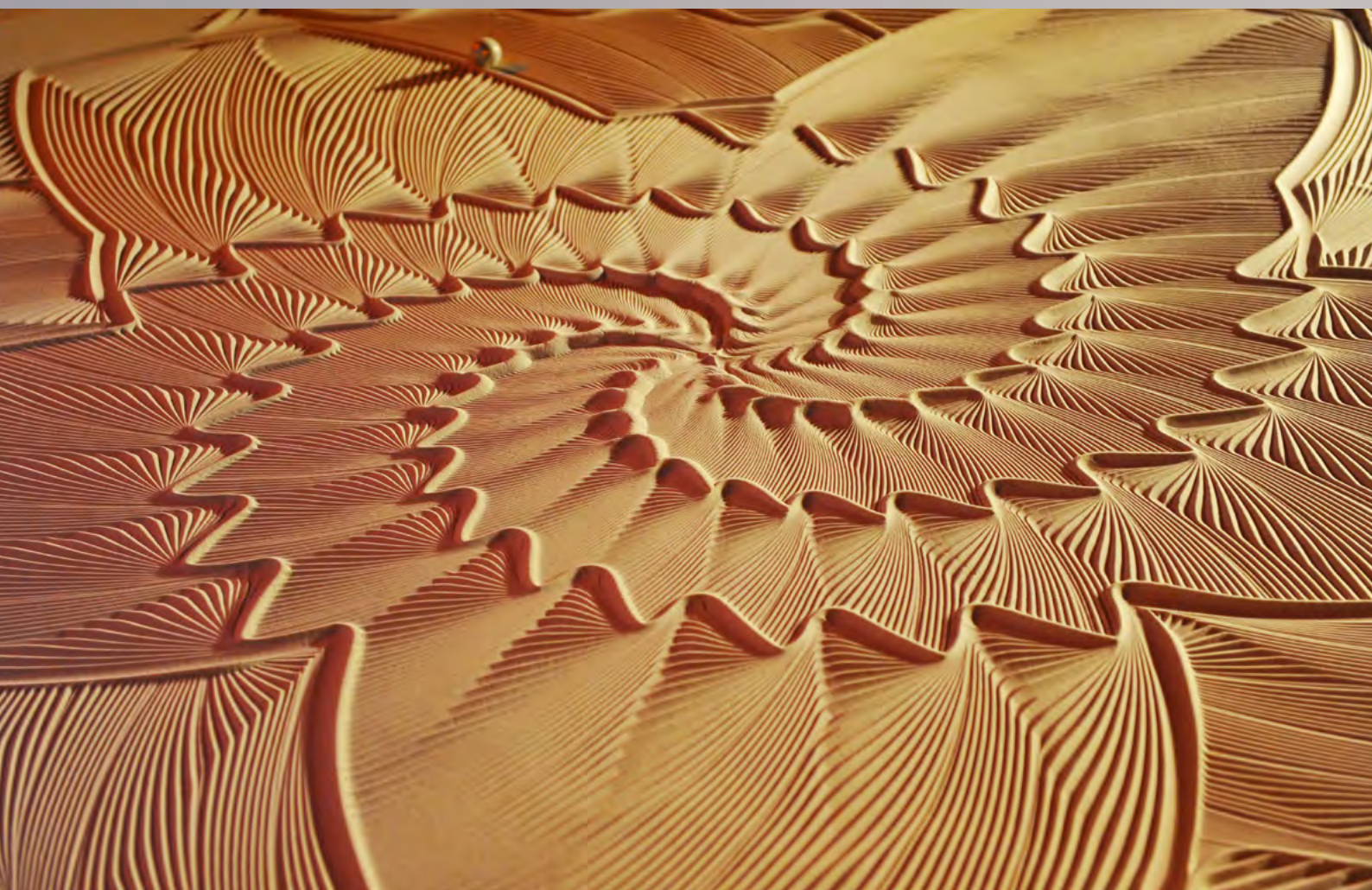
With Clair Barnes, Sabrina Weiss, Ishita Chakraborty, and Josh Ettinger.

How can we better understand the impacts of extreme weather events on society and catalyze meaningful climate action? This was the overarching question for this panel discussion, in which experts from diverse fields explored the intersection of journalism, art, and science in addressing the challenges posed by extreme weather events.

Workshop, June 4, 2025

Human Responses to Extreme Weather Events An Interdisciplinary Approach

As extreme weather events intensify with climate change, interdisciplinary research is essential for understanding their complex consequences. Yet, methodological challenges persist—especially in integrating data, analyzing individual effects, and conducting longitudinal studies. This workshop brought together natural and social scientists to examine societal impacts and behavioral responses, and to foster cross-field collaboration.





Danny van der Haven

Materials science

Born 1995 in 's-Hertogenbosch, NL

PhD: University of Cambridge, UK (2024)

Dingeman (Danny) van der Haven is a scientist in the field of computational mechanics. In his doctoral thesis, he worked on improving the compression of pharmaceutical powders into tablets using a combination of experimental and computational techniques. His work on pharmaceutical tablets received widespread attention in the pharmaceutical and scientific computing community.

Danny's current research focuses on the study of granular materials such as gravel, sand, and powders. Within this, his primary interest lies in connecting how the microscopic properties of granular materials, such as the individual grain size, shape, and stiffness, affect their macroscopic behavior. He aims to use this knowledge to improve the properties, predictability, and sustainability of both natural and manufactured granular materials. In doing so, he hopes to tackle the societal and economic issues associated with our current large-scale use and dependence on sand.

Associate fellow: David Kammer

Associate Professor of Solid Mechanics, ETH Zurich

Publications during fellowship

van der Haven, D., "Getting Down to Fundamentals." In *Granular Configurations: Sand, Materiality, and Planetary Urbanization*, edited by Michaela Büsse, 163–169. Berlin: K. Verlag, 2025.

Fellowship project

Saving Sand

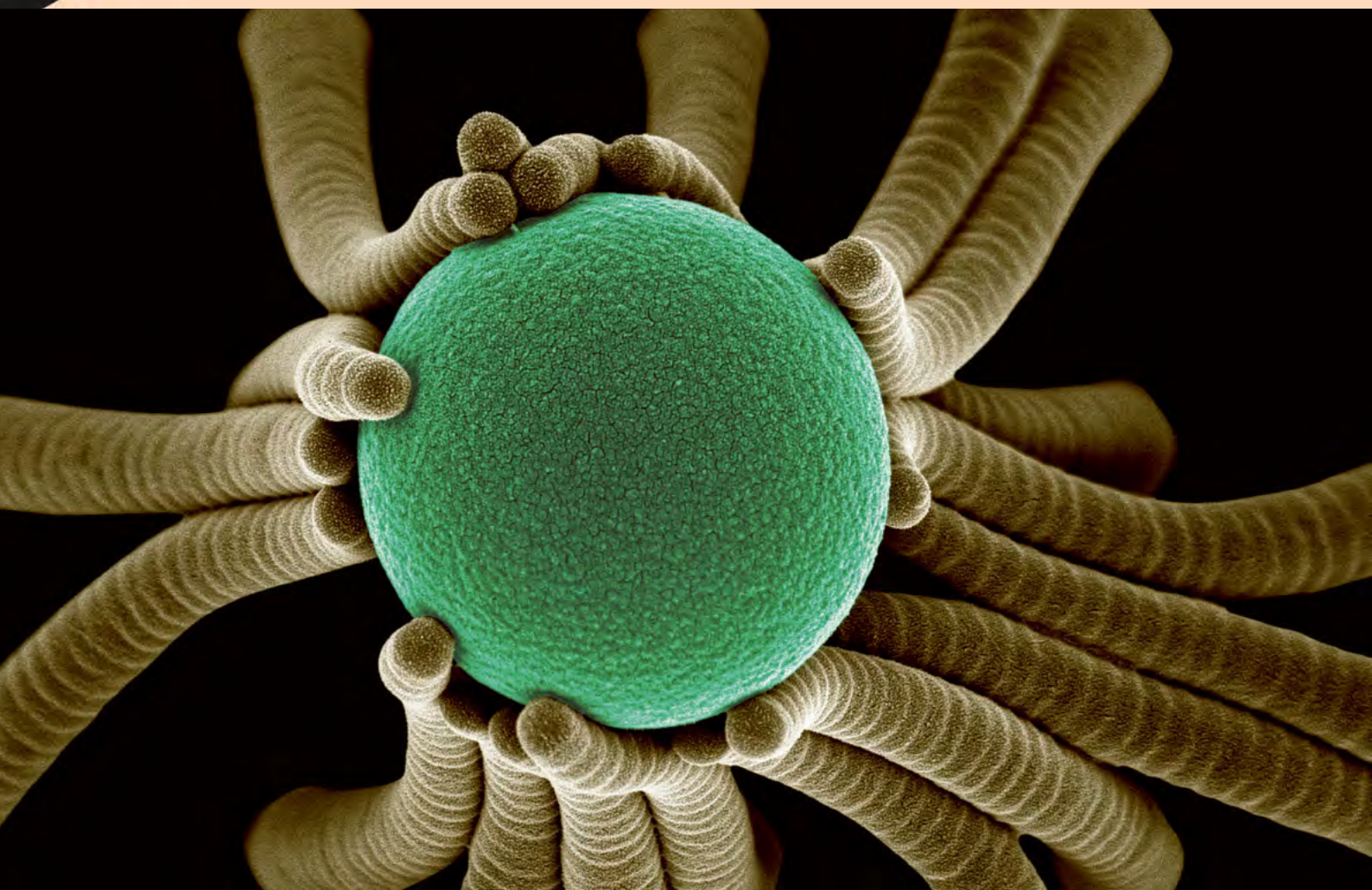
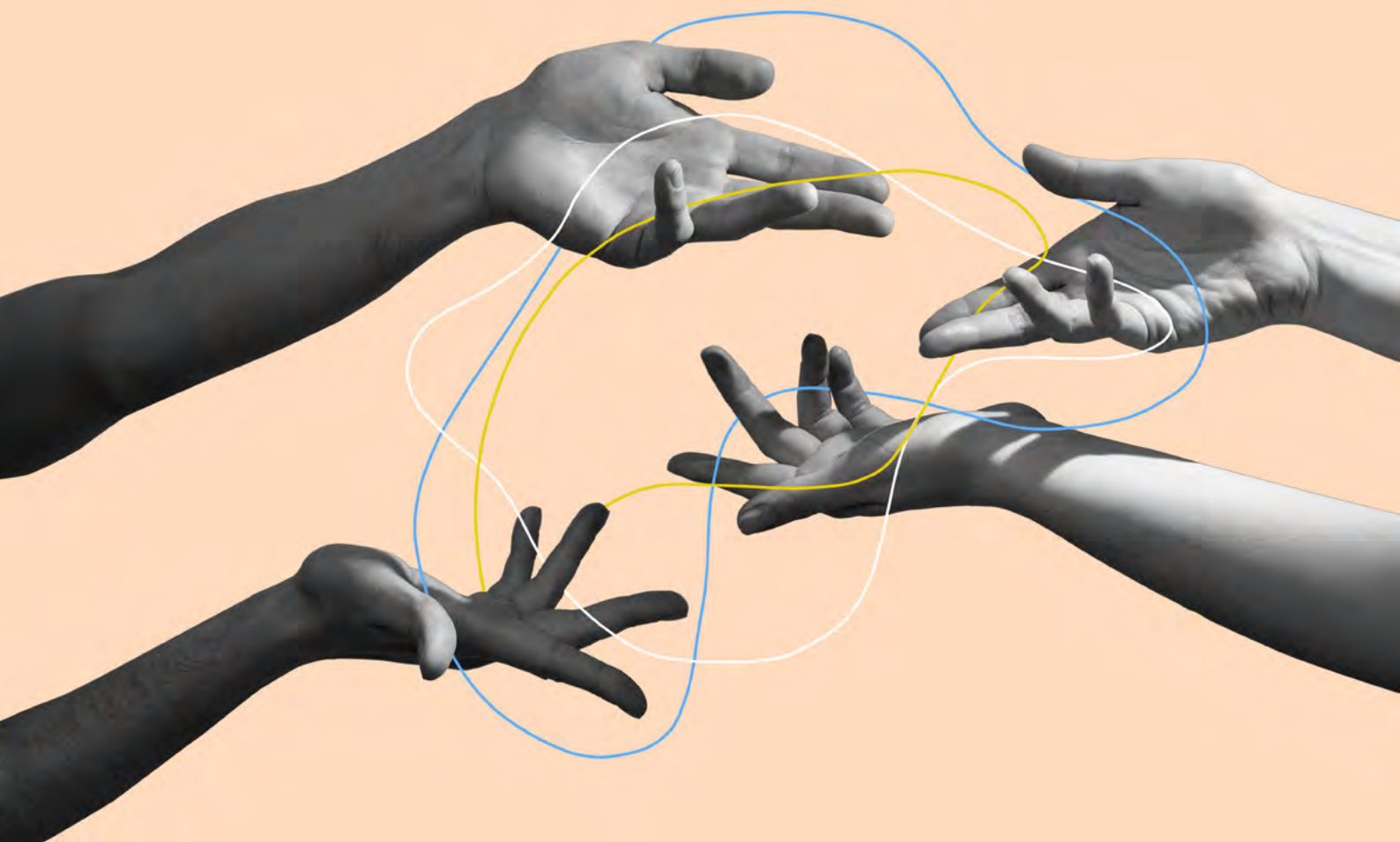
Upscaling Predictions of Grainy Materials for Sustainability

With a throughput of more than fifty billion tons per year, the sand-mining industry strongly impacts our economy, society, and environment. Different types of sand can create various material properties, resulting in materials such as concrete or asphalt. Consequently, the industry relies on tried-and-tested types of sand, often extracted from ecologically vulnerable areas. The aim of this project was to create a general computer model to effectively simulate billions of individual grains of sand, enabling meaningful predictions for dunes, dikes, concrete, and asphalt. Simulating each grain is not possible, and there is no universal mathematical formulation for granular materials. This project therefore made use of local symmetries and coupled discrete and continuum computational methods to develop a large-scale prediction method to be applied to current material and sustainability challenges.

Symposium, April 30, 2025

Modeling of Granular Materials Integrating Data, Computation, and Physics

The complexity of granular matter has long eluded any straightforward theory or computational model. As a consequence, predictions of the flow and mechanics of materials such as sand remain incredibly difficult. During this international symposium, various experts presented recent advances on the modeling of granular materials, including perspectives from physics and numerical methods, the calibration of such methods, and the integration of data-driven methodologies. The event was held in conjunction with a meeting of the Open Network on DEM simulations (ON-DEM), an international consortium funded by EU-COST. These events, and particularly their combination, led to several new collaborations and research visits.





Charlotte Müller

Learning sciences
Born 1995 in Bern, CH
PhD: ETH Zurich, CH (2023)

Charlotte Müller is a chemist and learning scientist. Her research focuses on the role of bodies in understanding imperceptible concepts. Working at the intersection of chemistry education and philosophy of chemistry, she is currently interested in the role of metaphors present in chemistry classrooms and how they affect reasoning processes.

In her doctoral dissertation, Charlotte investigated the learning of quantum chemistry through sensorimotor experience. Prior to her PhD, she completed a bachelor's degree in chemistry and molecular sciences at the University of Bern (CH), followed by a master's degree in computational science at the University of Zurich (CH), and a certificate in science journalism from the MAZ Institute for Journalism and Communication (CH).

Charlotte is currently continuing the project she started at the Collegium with her former associate fellow, Martina Rau, at ETH Zurich.

Associate fellow: **Martina Rau**
Professor of Research on Learning and Instruction, ETH Zurich

Publications during fellowship

Müller, C. H., Steiner, M., Unsleber, J. P., Weymuth, T., Bensberg, M., ..., and Reiher, M. "Heron: Visualizing and Controlling Chemical Reaction Explorations and Networks." *The Journal of Physical Chemistry A* 128, no. 41 (2024): 9028–9044.

Müller, C. H., and Rau, M. A. "Instructional Analogies Dominate, Domain-Inherent Metaphors Are Overlooked: A Systematic Review of Metaphorical Mappings in Chemistry Education." *Journal of Chemical Education* 102, no. 7 (2025): 2576–2591.

Chatain, J., Müller, C. H., Chatain, K., Calabrese, L., and Kapur, M. "Concreteness and Abstraction in Mathematics Education: A Taxonomy of the Semantic Landscape." (under review).

Theater, Performance, February 14, March 28, April 11, April 25, 2025

Ministry for the Future

Charlotte was part of the team that conceived *The Ministry for the Future*, a theater production collaboratively developed by the Collegium Helveticum, Theater Neumarkt, and scenography students of the HFG Karlsruhe. Inspired by Stanley Robinson's novel of the same name, they staged four pre-enactments of future scenarios, situated in Zurich in the year 2034. In all four episodes, the audience was confronted with a possible climate future, which was discussed by a panel of (real) experts in the field.

→ More on this collaboration on pages 56 and 59–62.

Fellowship project

Understanding by Means of Sensorimotor Experience The Role of Embodied Metaphor for Chemistry Learning

Expert knowledge in chemistry is heavily grounded in metaphor, with submicroscopic concepts often being understood and explained through more accessible concepts. These metaphors are present in language, but also in visualizations and gestures. Understanding these metaphors, including what they emphasize and obscure, poses a challenge for students. For instance, when students visualize chemical bonds as sticks, they are meant to associate the structural properties of sticks with chemical bonds. However, they may also incorrectly infer that, like sticks, chemical bonds require energy to form. This project systematically analyzed the expert language and gestures used in classrooms. Based on the findings from this initial phase, interventions will be developed to support the learning of these metaphors.

Panel discussion, March 31, 2025

Bodies in Science The Role of Human Bodies in Learning Abstract Scientific Concepts

With Magdalena Kersting, Venera Gashaj, Tamer Amin, and Kai Niebert

When toddlers start making sense of the world, they do so through sensory interactions. Over time, these experiences provide the foundation for integrating increasingly complex information. However, if learning is built on sensorimotor experiences, how can we grasp abstract and imperceptible concepts? In a panel discussion and subsequent workshop, leading experts on learning across various STEM domains examined the role of sensorimotor experiences in understanding scientific concepts, and what is considered evidence of understanding when bodies are included.

From the workshop, a collaboration for a review paper emerged. One of the panelists, Magdalena Kersting, recently received an Early-Career Collaboration Award, which will allow her to visit Charlotte for a month to work on this collaboration.





Anna Luhovska

Art history

Born 1996 in Kyiv, UA

PhD: National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture, UA (2023)

Anna Luhovska (Lugovska) is an art historian and visual artist with a varied artistic educational trajectory that includes degrees in monumental painting from the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture in Kyiv and training at the T. Shevchenko State Art School. Beyond her artistic pursuits, marked by various exhibitions and international residencies, Anna has also curated exhibitions and managed cultural and educational projects.

In her PhD project at the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture of Kyiv, Anna examined the intricate evolution of art institutions, presenting her findings through publications and conference presentations.

Associate fellow: Bärbel Küster

Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art, University of Zurich

Publications during fellowship

Luhovska, A. "Zurich's Art Scene: Institutional Impact on Artistic Career Development." *Cultural Trends*, (under review).

Luhovska, A. "Role of Zurich's Galleries and Off-Spaces in Shaping the Local Art Scene." *Journal of Cultural Economy*, (under review).

Luhovska, A. "Permanent Transformation: Evolution of Ukraine's Art Scene and Its Institutions (late 1980s to 2020)," *Art History*, (under review).

Fellowship project

Decoding Zurich's Art Scene Unraveling Institutional Impact on Artistic Career Development

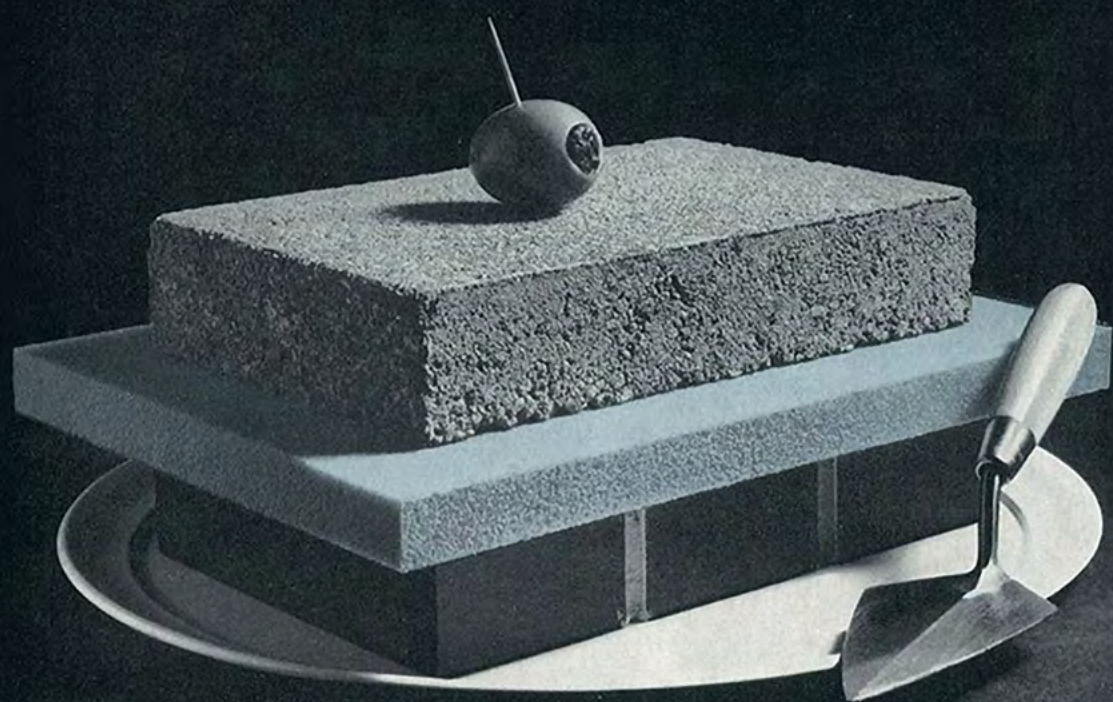
In her fellowship project, Anna aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the contemporary art institutional system in Zurich, emphasizing the perceptions and needs of artists. The analysis explored the inner workings of contemporary art institutions in Zurich—including galleries and off-spaces—identifying mechanisms of their communication with emerging artists and revealing structures of support. The research further scrutinized the influence of global and local factors on Zurich's art institutions, examining their contributions to the broader art community at the intersection of history, sociology, and economics. Central to the study was a comparative analysis with other prominent art scenes, highlighting the artistic bridges established by institutions. The results of the project were presented through publications and a panel discussion designed to benefit emerging artists and students at art universities.

Panel discussion, December 9, 2024

Decoding Zurich's Art Scene Unraveling Institutional Impact on Artistic Career Development

With Thomas Ruettimann, Barbara Basting, Martina Huber, Katharina Brandl, and Arianna Gellini

This panel discussion provided a nuanced exploration of Zurich's contemporary art ecosystem and its institutions, focusing on artists' perspectives and needs. It delved into what sets Zurich's art scene apart from other highly international locations. The panelists, representing a cross-section of Zurich's institutions—including galleries, off-spaces, political and grant organizations—shared insights into both the advantages and challenges artists encounter within Zurich's art environment. They further highlighted existing opportunities that encourage artists' professional growth. In addition, panelists presented their own projects, reflecting their institutional and personal commitment to supporting emerging artists. This initiative aimed to equip artists with valuable insider perspectives, while offering a forum for questions and a space to encourage network-building.





Jean Souviron

Architecture

Born 1988 in Oloron-Sainte-Marie, FR

PhD: Université Libre de Bruxelles, BE (2022)

Jean Souviron is an architect and civil engineer. His research examines 20th-century building techniques in relation to indoor climates and the environment. He studies the architectural, social, and ecological impacts of industrial policies and energy regulations, spanning the history of architecture and technology, engineering sciences, and environmental humanities. Since September 2025, Jean has been *maître de conférences* (equivalent to associate professor) at ENSA Paris-Est, Université Gustave Eiffel, where he leads the new postgraduate program “Architecture of Planetary Boundaries.”

Associate fellow: Laurent Stalder

Professor of the Theory of Architecture, ETH Zurich

Fellowship project

Sealed Climates Mapping the Ecological Impact of the Western European Thermal Modernity

Sealants, membranes, vapor barriers, insulation materials, and insulating glass units became ubiquitous in 20th-century buildings. These materials reflect the rise of Western thermal modernity, which created increasingly sealed indoor climates and helped define comfort and performance standards that now shape EU environmental policy. However, most insulation products marketed today rely on raw materials extracted, transported, and transformed through fossil-fuel-dependent industrial processes and ecologically unequal exchanges.

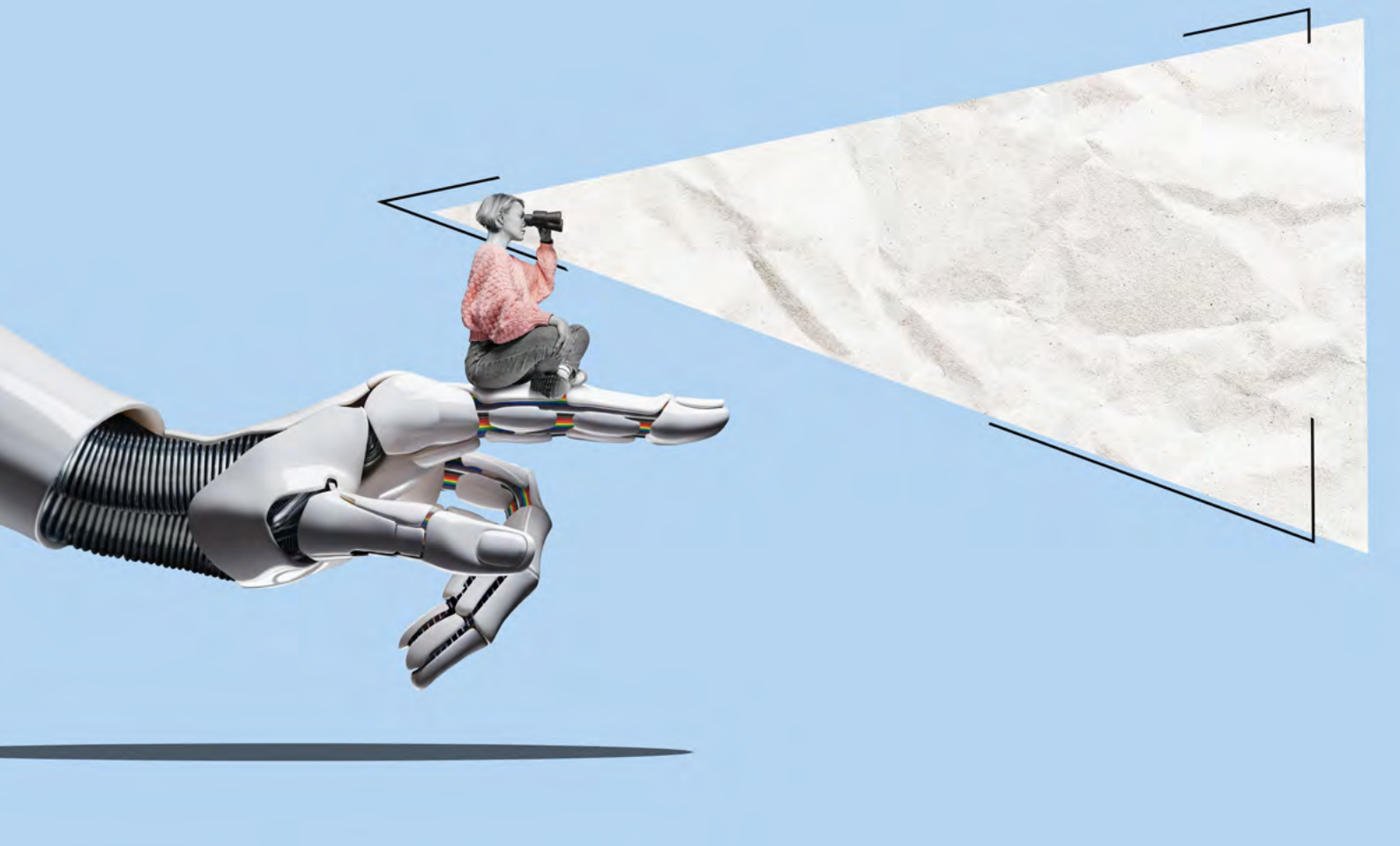
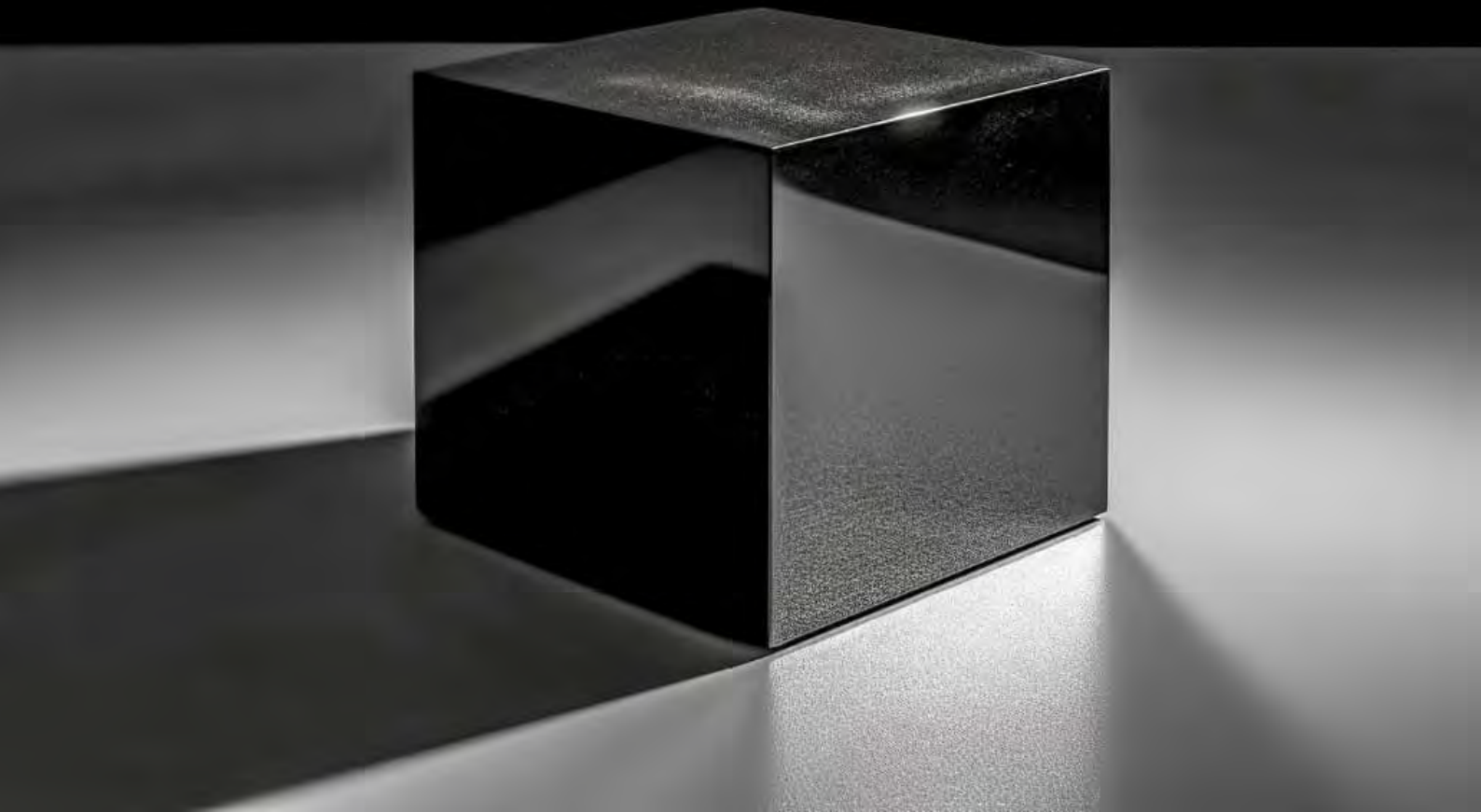
This project, which Jean is now continuing at ENSA Paris-Est, Université Gustave Eiffel, seeks to offer policymakers, researchers, and civil society a clearer understanding of the ecological impact of insulating architecture. It assesses, historicizes, and maps the material and energy flows tied to the production, use, and obsolescence of these products and their effects on people and ecosystems in Europe and beyond.

Workshop, May 19–20, 2025

Efficient? The History and Future of Architectural Performance

Co-convened with Associate Fellow Laurent Stalder and Guillaume Habert.

How have “efficiency” and “performance” shaped architectural theory and practice in relation to energy issues? This two-day workshop brought together historians, sociologists, engineers, and architects to explore the materialization of these two concepts throughout the history and life cycle of buildings. Presentations and discussions provided an opportunity to critically examine how this conceptual framework and related policies must evolve to address ongoing socio-ecological upheavals.





Francesco Sovrano

Responsible artificial intelligence
Born 1991 in Camposampiero, IT
PhD: University of Bologna, IT (2023)

Francesco Sovrano is a data scientist specializing in explainability for responsible artificial intelligence, with a particular emphasis on software engineering, education, and legal compliance. His work links the philosophy of explanation with empirical explainable AI (XAI) methods to study how AI models (especially generative systems such as ChatGPT) produce explanations, and how to measure, audit, and reduce the harmful biases they can contain. As part of his research, Francesco builds tools that make model reasoning transparent and legally compliant, with practical applications in education and software engineering.

Before joining the Collegium Helveticum, Francesco was a senior researcher at the University of Zurich. Currently, he holds a postdoctoral position at the Università della Svizzera italiana in Lugano (CH).

Associate fellow: **Alberto Bacchelli**
Associate Professor of Empirical Software Engineering, University of Zurich

Publications during fellowship

Sovrano, F., Bauer, A., and Bacchelli, A. "Large Language Models for In-File Vulnerability Localization Can Be 'Lost in the End.'" *Proceedings of the ACM on Software Engineering* 2, no. FSE (2025): 891–913.

Sovrano, F., and Miller, T. "MAGIX: a Unified Framework for the Use of XAI in Enterprises." In *Enterprise AI*, edited by Shazia Sadiq, 183–209. Berlin: Springer Nature, 2025.

Sovrano, F., "Can Global XAI Methods Reveal Injected Bias in LLMs? SHAP vs Rule Extraction vs RuleSHAP." (2025, preprint, under review).

Sovrano, F., Dominici, G., Sevastjanova, R., Stramiglio, A., and Bacchelli, A. "Is General-Purpose AI Reasoning Sensitive to Data-Induced Cognitive Biases? Dynamic Benchmarking on Typical Software Engineering Dilemmas." (under review).

Sovrano, F. and A. Bacchelli, A. "Chain-of-Illucution Prompting Elicits Factuality in Retrieval-Augmented Programming Explanations." (under review).

Sovrano, F., Vilone, G., Lognoul, M., and Longo, L. "Legal XAI: A Systematic Review and Interdisciplinary Mapping of XAI and EU Law, Towards a Research Agenda for Legally Responsible AI." (2025, preprint, under review).

Fellowship project

Explaining the Unexplainable Bridging the Gap Between Generative AI and Theory- Driven Explanations

In his fellowship project, Francesco investigated how black-box generative AI (GenAI) systems like ChatGPT produce explanations in domains such as education, climate action, and gender equality, and whether those outputs embed harmful bias. Since current explainable AI (XAI) methods don't scale to GenAI, the project took an interdisciplinary approach, combining philosophy of explanations, empirical research, and XAI techniques.

Key outcomes included both tools to detect and measure harmful cognitive and statistical biases in GenAI as well as methods to embed philosophy-driven insights into the generative process so as to improve factual accuracy and user control. Ultimately, the goal of this ongoing project is to develop an empirically-grounded computational theory of explanations to better understand and guide GenAI-generated explanations.

Symposium, January 21–22, 2025

Navigating Generative AI in Education Risks, Rewards, and the Role of Explainability

Generative AI (GenAI) has moved from research to classrooms, raising the question of how it can be used responsibly. This symposium brought together educators and scholars to discuss how GenAI can both enrich and disrupt education, with a focus on the role of explainability in responsible educational AI. Talks covered topics such as digital learning, design modeling learning, AI in computing education, GenAI policy, cognitive/affective dimensions, and classroom tools. To conclude each day, the speakers engaged further through two panel discussions that examined legal and didactic implications and the role of explainability, offering interdisciplinary insights and guidance.

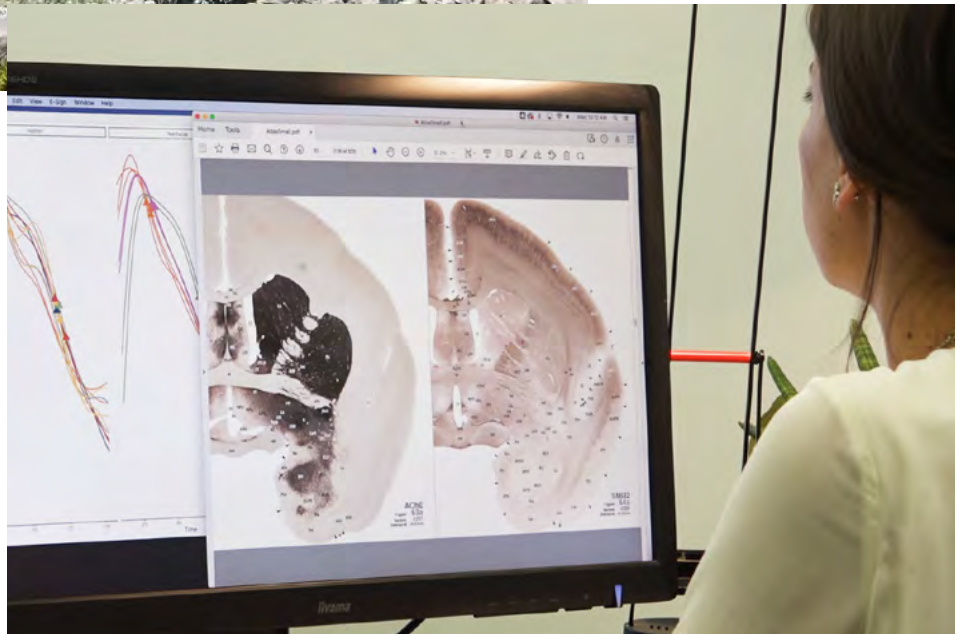
“The Collegium has helped me immensely in shaping my research identity, sharpening my focus, and clarifying my core interests.”



Charlotte Müller
Learning sciences
Early-Career Fellow 2024–2025

Decisive Moments

Fellows Shaping Their Own Path



A fellowship at the Collegium can mark a turning point in the fellows' careers: a phase of reflection, exploration, and reorientation. In this series, former fellows share what motivated them to apply for a fellowship and how their time at the Collegium helped shape their individual paths—be that through new collaborations, shifts in perspective, or the courage to pursue unexpected directions—as well as where those experiences have taken them.

Broadening horizons



Paola Cerrito, Primatology
Early-Career Fellow 2022–2023
PhD: New York University, US (2022)

Currently: Assistant Professor at the
Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology,
University of Zurich, CH

“I was in the final stages of my PhD in evolutionary primatology at New York University when I thought about applying for an early-career fellowship at the Collegium. I was eager to broaden my expertise beyond the narrow scope of my doctoral research, and took the opportunity to engage in independent and interdisciplinary research.

The Collegium fellowship proved to be a transformative experience in multiple ways: I embarked on an independent research project right after graduation—a rare opportunity in the life sciences. It also enabled me to establish valuable collaborations in Zurich, fostering connections not only with my associate fellow but also with scholars outside my immediate field. This interdisciplinary engagement broadened my perspective and helped frame my research in ways that resonated far beyond evolutionary biology and anthropology.

The impact of this fellowship was evident when I received tenure-track assistant professor offers from both Duke University and the University of Zurich. Both search committees emphasized the breadth and independence of my research—qualities nurtured by my experience at the Collegium.

In spring 2025, I began my tenure-track assistant professorship at the Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology at the University of Zurich, ready to carry forward the path that the Collegium fellowship so profoundly shaped.”

Time, trust, and visibility



Madeline Woker, History
Early-Career Fellow 2023–2024
PhD: Columbia University, US (2020)

Currently: Assistant Professor of History,
Princeton University, US; recipient of
the second prize of the Swiss Academy
of Humanities and Social Sciences (SAGW)
in 2025

“I wanted to spend a year in Switzerland, my home country, to reconnect and learn more about its academic world. The Collegium seemed like the perfect place: affiliated with leading institutions, it offered unparalleled access to seminars and conferences while also providing the quiet space of the old observatory for deep thinking and writing. Being in Zurich, a city undergoing rapid transformation, added another layer of inspiration.

The Collegium gave me both support and visibility to pursue ambitious projects. I built lasting ties with scholars at the University of Zurich and the Geneva Graduate Institute, and together we organized a two-day international conference on global tax justice. With the Collegium’s support, we invited renowned economist Gabriel Zucman, creating an exchange that brought my work to wider audiences.

Equally important, the fellowship gave me the peace of mind to make substantial progress on my book manuscript, *A Taxing Empire: Taxation and Power in the French Colonial World, 1850s–1950s*, while also connecting me to the international tax law community.

Afterwards, I taught at the University of Sheffield before becoming assistant professor of history at Princeton University. The Collegium represents a cornerstone of this path, as it provided not just time and trust, but visibility that continues to shape my career today.”

Open minds and sustainable scents



Frida Michailidou, Chemistry
Early-Career Fellow 2021–2022
PhD: University of St Andrews, UK (2016)

Currently: CEO of Olymra;
ETH Alumni Delegate 2025–2029

“When I applied to the Collegium, I carried with me a fascination for perfumes and fragrance. As a researcher, I see scent as more than a personal passion. It is an intellectual frontier, a way of exploring sustainability, biotechnology, human perception, and consumer behavior all at once. What drew me to the Collegium was precisely its openness to such experimental and unconventional projects. I experienced it as an oasis, both physically and intellectually, where bold ideas were encouraged and even attempts that looked like failures were valued as part of the process.

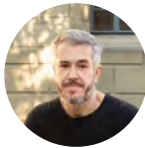
During my fellowship, I finally began a project I had long envisioned: making fragrances sustainable. I explored headspace analysis to capture the scent of rare plants without destroying them, developed enzyme-based methods to produce fragrance molecules, and collaborated with consumer behavior experts to test how people perceive fragrances made through biotechnology. Regular exchanges with colleagues from other disciplines pushed me beyond my comfort zone and reshaped the way I thought about my work.

The Collegium also gave me lasting visibility and support through media outreach, mentoring, and encouragement even after the fellowship had ended. I left more open-minded, eager to engage with perspectives beyond my own field.

Today, I continue this path as CEO of Olymra where everything comes together again: I use the tools, ideas, and collaborations I developed and began during my fellowship. The Collegium remains central to my journey. It gave me the space, courage, and confidence to believe that my ideas were worth pursuing.”



Ideas converge into practice



Bruno Moreschi, Media studies
Early-Career Fellow 2023–2024
PhD: State University of Campinas, BR (2018)
Currently: Associate Professor of New Media,
Aalto University, FI

“When I arrived at the Collegium, I brought with me several years of work at the University of São Paulo, where I co-founded the Group on AI and Art (GAIA). I had gathered a wealth of research and ideas on how image datasets shape computer vision systems. At the Collegium, I found exactly what I needed: a balance of focused time and ongoing exchange. This atmosphere allowed me to process that accumulated material and turn it into new work, including the feature film *Acapulco*.

The Collegium’s spirit of cross-disciplinary exchange was crucial. My colleagues not only supported my research but also broadened my perspective on how artistic research fits into the European academic landscape. Their encouragement pushed me to apply for faculty positions and major funding opportunities I might not have considered otherwise.

Only a few months later, I was appointed associate professor of new media at Aalto University, where I continue to build directly on the research I shaped during the fellowship. I am also completing a book that grows out of these reflections. The Collegium continues to be a central reference point for me, an intellectual community whose impact continues to reverberate in my work.”

Where community shapes research



Emma Mavodza, Development studies
Early-Career Fellow 2023–2024
PhD: University of Witwatersrand, ZA (2023)
Currently: Senior Researcher, Swiss
National Science Foundation (SNSF)
Ambizione grantee, University of Zurich, CH

“As a development researcher, I study how excluded voices—especially Black women—experience technologies. I believe that today’s global challenges demand transdisciplinary collaboration, so I sought a fellowship with that outlook. When I learned about the Collegium, I was immediately drawn to its interdisciplinary community. What made it unique for me was the freedom to pursue my project with full autonomy, while receiving trust and the institutional support to organize and host an international conference.

At the Collegium, I benefited from both professional and informal exchanges with a diverse group of fellows. We formed a genuine community that connected and bonded not only around our research but also beyond academic topics. The richness of their perspectives across disciplines, backgrounds, and identities, pushed me beyond my comfort zone and helped me see my work in new ways, appreciating how it was perceived and valued in ways I had not originally imagined.

The fellowship opened important doors: I went on to teach at the University of Lucerne, received a junior fellowship at the University of Bern, and ultimately secured an SNSF Ambizione grant. Today, at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at University of Zurich, I am working on a project exploring how Black women in South Africa experience assisted reproductive technologies. My time at the Collegium remains foundational, shaping both my research and my openness to collaboration across boundaries.”

“The Collegium’s interdisciplinary structure gave me the courage to reach out to experts far beyond my field, turning dialogue into mutual enrichment. For example while working in the ETH Zurich Chemical Collections, I traced the organic dye brazilin and, with my expertise, correctly reidentified a historical wooden printing block as part of dye chemistry. Connections through the Collegium fellows also brought me to a historian of chemistry, whose insights were invaluable for advancing my research.”

Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry
Workshop & exhibition, June 13 – July 11, 2025
→ Details on page 13



Denise Bertschi
Visual, material, and spatial history
Early-Career Fellow 2024–2025



Spotlight Courage to Connect

Senior Fellows

Visiting Professors, Academic and Artistic Guests



Link to fellows
2024–2025

The following pages offer short portraits of the senior fellows who spent time at the Collegium between September 2024 and June 2025. More information on their profiles, the projects they worked on as fellows, and the events they organized can be found on the Collegium’s website (see link above). Brief descriptions of the events convened by senior fellows can be found in this publication’s chapter on “Events at the Collegium Helveticum.”



Milad Abolhasani
ALCOA Professor of Chemical
and Biomolecular Engineering
North Carolina State University, US
Chemical engineering

Milad Abolhasani's research explores the integration of reaction engineering with artificial intelligence and robotics to accelerate materials discovery. While at the Collegium Helveticum, he worked on advancing fluidic self-driving laboratories—autonomous experimentation platforms that combine AI, automation, and microfluidics—for the accelerated, sustainable, and scalable discovery of semiconductor and catalytic materials, which are critical to future energy and computing technologies.

Associate fellow: **Andrew deMello**
Professor of Biochemical Engineering and Applied Biosciences,
ETH Zurich



Audrey Bowden
Associate Professor
of Biomedical Engineering
Vanderbilt University, US
Biomedical engineering

In her research, Audrey Bowden focuses on the development of light-based technologies to assess health, detect diseases, and monitor treatment. She is particularly passionate about developing technologies to improve healthcare access and raise the standard of care for people in rural and disadvantaged communities. Her fellowship project, *Luminous Links*, aimed to showcase the importance and beauty of light—as a scientific and artistic concept—and how light makes our lives better.

Associate fellow: **Daniel Razansky**
Professor of Biomedical Imaging, ETH Zurich



Grace Ballor
Assistant Professor
of International
Economic History
Bocconi University, IT
Economic and environmental history

Grace Ballor is a historian specializing in the international political economy of contemporary Europe, the economic consequences of climate change, and the intersections of global capitalism and global governance. In the late 20th century, even as national governments and international organizations accepted scientific conclusions about anthropogenic climate change and promoted adaptation and mitigation measures, they also began to recognize the shortcomings of those efforts, increasingly adopting risk management approaches. It is this history of climate risk management in Europe and the world that Grace focused on during her fellowship.

Associate fellow: **Frank Schimmelfennig**
Professor of European Politics, ETH Zurich



Moran Bercovici
Professor of Mechanical
Engineering
Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, IL
Mechanical engineering

Moran Bercovici leads a curiosity-driven lab with core expertise in fluid mechanics. He is equally interested in understanding basic phenomena associated with the physics and chemistry of fluids and in leveraging these to create new capabilities across a wide range of applications—from medical diagnostics to space optics. During his time at the Collegium, Moran focused on expanding his *Fluidic Shaping* approach toward architectural structures, leading to an exhibit at both the Collegium and the Venice Biennale for Architecture.

Associate fellow: **Lucio Isa**
Professor of Soft Materials and Interfaces, ETH Zurich



Louis-Philippe Dalember
Writer and Poet
Independent, HT & FR
Literature

Louis-Philippe Dalember is a Haitian writer and poet known for his works that explore themes of identity, exile, and cultural heritage, often featuring strong female characters. During his fellowship at the Collegium and visiting professorship at ETH Zurich, Louis-Philippe brought together a diverse array of journalists, sociologists, and authors to engage in dialogues that explored the intricate interplay between the ways we write and re-write our world through literature.

Associate fellow: **Andreas Kilcher**
Professor of Literature and Cultural Studies, ETH Zurich



Anna Magdalena Elsner
Associate Professor
of French Studies
and Medical Humanities
University of St. Gallen, CH
Literature

Through her work on death, dying, and mourning, Anna Magdalena Elsner aims to foster critical as well as transdisciplinary thinking about medicine, care, and the end of life. At the Collegium, Anna's project examined palliative care—the paradigmatic end-of-life care modality in the West since the 1970s—and assisted dying in French literature, philosophy, and visual culture. Working towards a new cultural history of dying in contemporary France, she explored how aesthetic representations of dying are embedded in broader cultural traditions while also being shaped by local, historical, and national contexts of end-of-life care.

Associate fellow: **Sandro Zanetti**
Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Zurich



Reto Geiser
Associate Professor
of Architecture
Rice University, US
Architecture

As an architect and scholar specializing in modern architecture, Reto Geiser is interested in fostering dialogue both between past and present and between theoretical inquiry and engaged practice. In his fellowship project, *Reverse Ruins*, Reto examined the construction site as an ephemeral and often overlooked stage in the production of architecture—one that vanishes as buildings are completed. Using archival photography of building sites as a lens to explore the cultural, geographic, and economic conditions of these spaces in time, he sought to reveal technological and societal transformations.

Associate fellow: **Philip Ursprung**
Professor of the History of Art and Architecture, ETH Zurich



Gina Gibson
Professor of Digital
Communication
Black Hills State University, US
Digital communication

Gina Gibson is a visual artist and professor whose work is interdisciplinary, often exploring themes of science, history, and place. During her visiting professorship in the Department of Physics at the University of Zurich and her fellowship at the Collegium, Gina collaborated with researchers to create a new body of artwork that explores the field of particle physics. Building on her experience as the first artist-in-residence at the Sanford Underground Research Facility (SURF), Gina also helped to establish an artistic residency program within the Department of Physics at the University of Zurich.

Associate fellow: **Björn Penning**
Professor of Physics, University of Zurich



Ignacio E. Grossmann
R. R. Dean University
Professor in the Department
of Chemical Engineering
Carnegie Mellon University, US
Chemical engineering

Ignacio E. Grossmann's research engages with questions around the optimization of the expansion planning of reliable and resilient power systems where there is a high penetration of renewables, the logistics and field management of CO₂ capture and sequestration, optimization models for digital supply chain optimization, and stochastic programming methods for optimization under uncertainty. During his time at the Collegium, Ignacio worked on developing optimization models for the synthesis and design of sustainable processes and energy systems.

Associate fellow: **Gonzalo Guillén Gosálbez**
Professor of Chemical Systems Engineering, ETH Zurich



Nikou Hamzehpour
Associate Professor
of Soil Science
University of Maragheh, IR
Soil science and environmental degradation

In her research, Nikou Hamzehpour focuses on soil degradation in arid regions, including salinization and wind erosion linked to Lake Urmia's desiccation. At the Collegium, she explored how specific dust and soil properties affect ice nucleation and cloud formation. She further worked on strategies to enhance soil organic matter as a key factor in sustainable land use and climate resilience.

Associate fellow: **Sebastian Dötterl**
Associate Professor of Soil Resources, ETH Zurich



Naomi Clara Hanakata
Assistant Professor
of Urban Design
National University of Singapore, SG
Urban development

Naomi C. Hanakata is an urban studies and planning scholar and practitioner with a focus on Asia. In her work, she examines urban transition processes, particularly socio-technical transformations, and how these shape the urban environment. During her fellowship, Naomi examined the renewable energy transition in Southeast Asia and the aspect of justice in the exploration and incorporation of new resource frontiers, as well as the implications this will have on finite resources.

Associate fellow: **Milica Topalović**
Associate Professor of Architecture and Territorial Planning, ETH Zurich



Bjørn Hofmann
Professor of Philosophy
of Medicine and Bioethics
University of Oslo and Norwegian University
of Science and Technology at Gjøvik, NO
Philosophy of medicine and bioethics

With a background spanning the natural sciences, the history of ideas, and philosophy, Bjørn Hofmann's primary research interests include fundamental concepts for healthcare, norms of knowledge and evidence production, the theory and practice of governing technology, health services research, and (bio)medical ethics. In his fellowship project, Bjørn explored the ethical dimensions of biases in artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) in medicine and healthcare, focusing on the case of AI/ML in breast cancer screening and detection.

Associate fellow: **Roberto Andorno**
Privatdozent (equivalent to senior lecturer) of Bioethics and Biomedical Law, University of Zurich

“The interdisciplinary environment at the Collegium broadened my perspective and introduced me to new approaches in both my academic work and teaching practice.”



Tülin Kaman
Computational and applied mathematics
Senior Fellow 2024–2025



Jill Johnson
Independent dancer
and choreographer

Previously (2011–2021): Director of Dance,
Harvard University, US
Dance and choreography

Jill Johnson focuses on developing sustainable economic frameworks for the arts, integrating artists' collaborative problem-solving. At the Collegium, Jill convened interdisciplinary experts to discuss sustainable structures and policies that ensure the vitality, relevancy, and solvency of art, artists, and cultural organizations. In today's hyper-digital age, with dwindling support for the arts and ongoing cost-of-living crises, she asked: What might a new economy for artists look like?

Associate fellow: **Jason Beechey**
Head of Dance, Zurich University of the Arts



Christoforos Moutafis
Reader in Nano Engineering
and Spintronic Technologies

University of Manchester, UK
Nano engineering

Christoforos Moutafis explores the intersection of spintronics, nanoscale physics, and neuromorphic computing to develop ultra-energy-efficient AI hardware. In his fellowship project, Christoforos explored how nanoscale spintronics-based components can be combined with ideas from neuroscience to create next-generation computing systems. Aiming to develop energy-efficient and durable artificial synapses, he specifically focused on skyrmionics nanosynapses—nanoscale devices that use magnetic skyrmions to achieve non-volatile, multi-level conductance changes.

Associate fellow: **Giacomo Indiveri**
Professor at the Institute of Neuroinformatics, University of Zurich and ETH Zurich



Tülin Kaman
Associate Professor and
Lawrence Jesser Toll Jr. Chair

University of Arkansas, US
Computational and applied mathematics

In her research, Tülin Kaman works on modeling and simulations in fluids, numerical methods for partial differential equations, computer aspects of numerical algorithms in scientific parallel computing, and uncertainty quantification. During her fellowship, Tülin grappled with the dynamics of unpredictable systems of weather forecasting—one of the most challenging environmental, economic, and societal problems—made ever more pressing by global warming and the rise in severe weather events. Centering on verification, validation, and uncertainty quantification (VVUQ) studies, she aimed to develop accurate and efficient models for extreme weather simulations.

Associate fellow: **Renato Pajarola**
Professor of Visualization and Multimedia, University of Zurich



Matthias Neubert
Professor of Theoretical
High-Energy Physics

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, DE
Theoretical physics

Matthias Neubert's research focuses on theoretical particle physics, strong interactions and collider physics, flavor physics, charge-parity violation, and physics beyond the Standard Model. During his fellowship, Matthias aimed to improve the precision of calculations for rare decays of B meson. These processes are pivotal for two reasons: They enable the determination of key parameters within the Standard Model of particle physics and offer promising opportunities to uncover "new physics" beyond the Standard Model.

Associate fellow: **Gino Isidori**
Professor of Theoretical Physics, University of Zurich



Jakob Ohme
Head of Digital News
Dynamics Research Group

Weizenbaum Institute Berlin, DE
Communication studies

Jakob Ohme's work emphasizes the changes digital and mobile communications bring to news consumption and political engagement, particularly across different generations. He is dedicated to advancing digital methodologies in political communication and journalism research, notably through the innovative use of digital trace data. In his fellowship project, he studied how visual information on digital platforms such as Instagram and TikTok reshapes news content distribution and reception.

Associate fellow: **Frank Esser**
Professor of International and Comparative Media Research, University of Zurich



Robert Pringle
 Professor of Ecology
 and Evolutionary Biology
 Princeton University, US
 Ecology and evolutionary biology

Robert Pringle's research addresses questions at the interface of community, molecular, and evolutionary ecology, along with more applied topics in ecophysiology and ecosystem restoration. Throughout his career, Rob has integrated diverse research approaches in innovative ways, often combining large-scale field experiments with laboratory analyses, remote sensing, and modeling. His work seeks to uncover the mechanisms behind biodiversity maintenance, the consequences of biodiversity loss, and the factors contributing to ecological resilience.

Associate fellow: **Janneke Hille Ris Lambers**
 Professor of Plant Ecology, ETH Zurich



Konstantinos Vogiatzis
 Associate Professor of
 Theoretical and
 Computational Chemistry
 University of Tennessee, US
 Theoretical chemistry

Konstantinos Vogiatzis explores how quantum chemistry and machine learning can be combined to discover molecules and materials for energy and sustainability. His research focuses on interpretable AI models, computer-human interaction, and high-accuracy quantum methods to guide the design of catalysts and carbon capture agents, bridging theory with real-world chemical innovation.

Associate fellow: **Markus Reiher**
 Professor of Theoretical Chemistry, ETH Zurich



Mahdi Taiebat
 Professor of
 Civil Engineering
 University of British Columbia, CA
 Geotechnical engineering

Mahdi Taiebat focuses on modeling the mechanical behavior of geomaterials, integrating concepts from geotechnical engineering, mechanics, and computational sciences. In his fellowship project, Mahdi explored the development and application of advanced constitutive models and numerical modeling techniques to simulate the response of geomaterials and geosystems under cyclic loading. By doing so he sought to address critical challenges in geotechnical earthquake engineering and to contribute to the creation of safer and more resilient infrastructure.

Associate fellow: **Ioannis Anastasopoulos**
 Professor of Geotechnical Engineering, ETH Zurich



Pujo Semedi Hargo Yuwono
 Professor of Anthropology
 Gadjah Mada University, ID
 Social and cultural anthropology

After studying loosely-structured fishing villages as well as tightly-structured plantation communities, Pujo Semedi Hargo Yuwono is currently researching the highly stratified dynamics of farming communities on the Indonesian island of Java and in Southern Germany. At the Collegium, Pujo continued his exploration of a highly productive coffee plantation in Java that consistently reported losses due to the appropriation of assets by both workers and management. His analysis conceptualizes the plantation as both a site of production and a battleground for the distribution of wealth.

Associate fellow: **Annuska Derks**
 Professor of Social Transformation Processes,
 University of Zurich, CH



Corina Tarnita
 Professor of Ecology
 and Evolutionary Biology
 Princeton University, US
 Ecology and evolutionary biology

Corina Tarnita's research focuses on understanding complex adaptive systems, ranging from single cells to entire ecosystems. She explores how these systems originate, assemble, interact with their environment, and evolve over time. In her fellowship project, Corina engaged with new empirical data that challenges the prevailing view that evolution began with a simple ancestor, suggesting a far more complex starting point. In response, Corina sought to develop a conceptual framework that synthesizes these observations and outlines the critical steps that led to the emergence of the first multicellular individual or eusocial colony.

Associate fellow: **Sebastian Bonhoeffer**
 Professor of Theoretical Biology, ETH Zurich

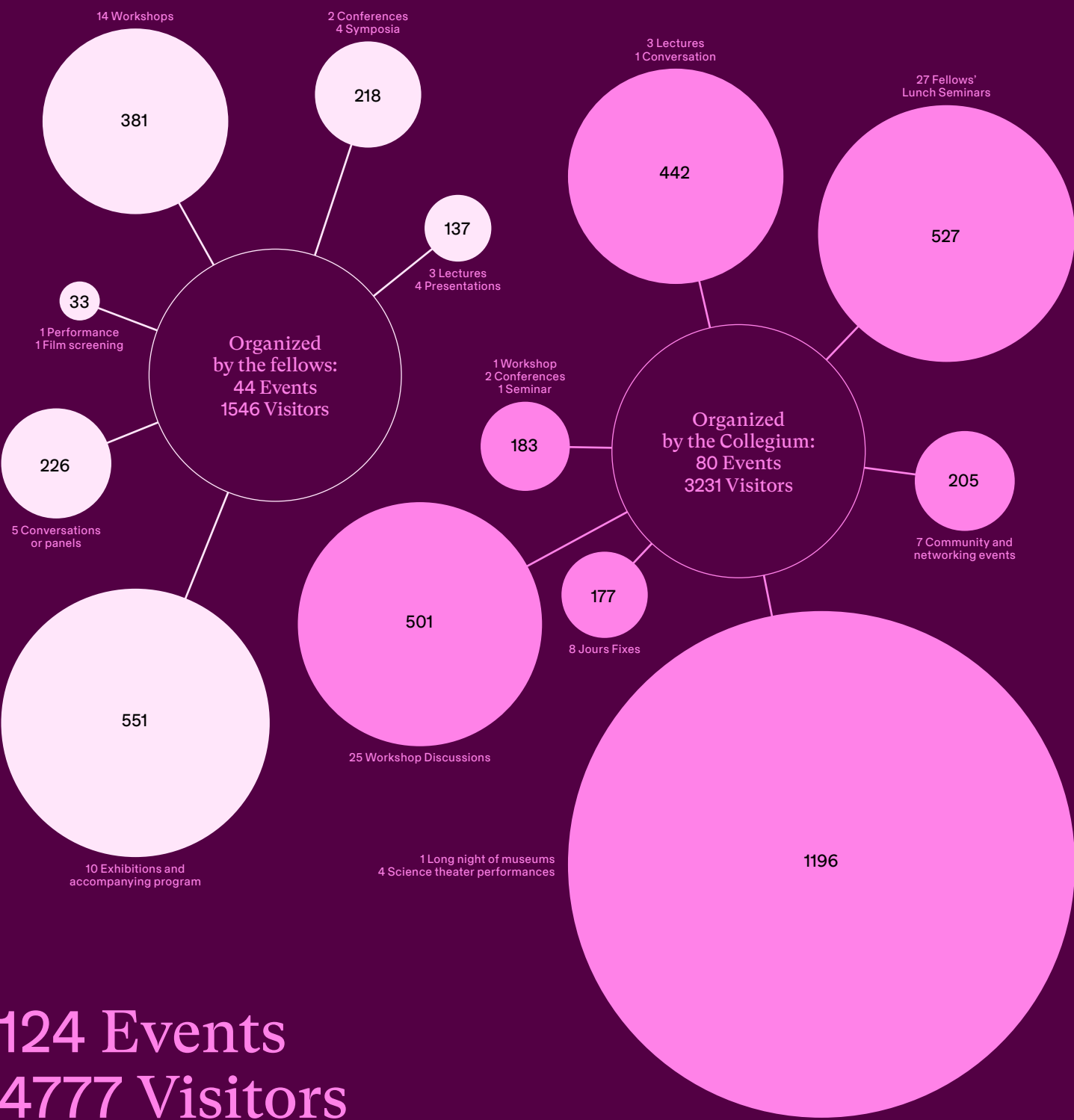
Academic Life & Engaging Different Audiences

The Collegium is a place of exchange, open to creative and experimental ideas. Thinking about and acting on the big challenges of the future require the engagement of different disciplines and audiences. In its program, the Collegium follows a bottom-up approach, inviting fellows to organize in groups around topics of shared interest, including “places of kinship,” “climate change and aesthetics,” “futures of technology,” “academia, society, and creativity,” and “library of nostalgia.”

Bringing together a diverse group of fellows allows for new perspectives to emerge and grow—far beyond the fellowship period. In addition to providing protected time and space for individual projects, the Collegium therefore facilitates exchange between fellows across a wide range of disciplines. With its academic program, the Collegium encourages fellows to develop skills for cooperation and thinking together across disciplinary boundaries. Such experiences also foster mutual trust, an essential element for collaboration between disciplines.

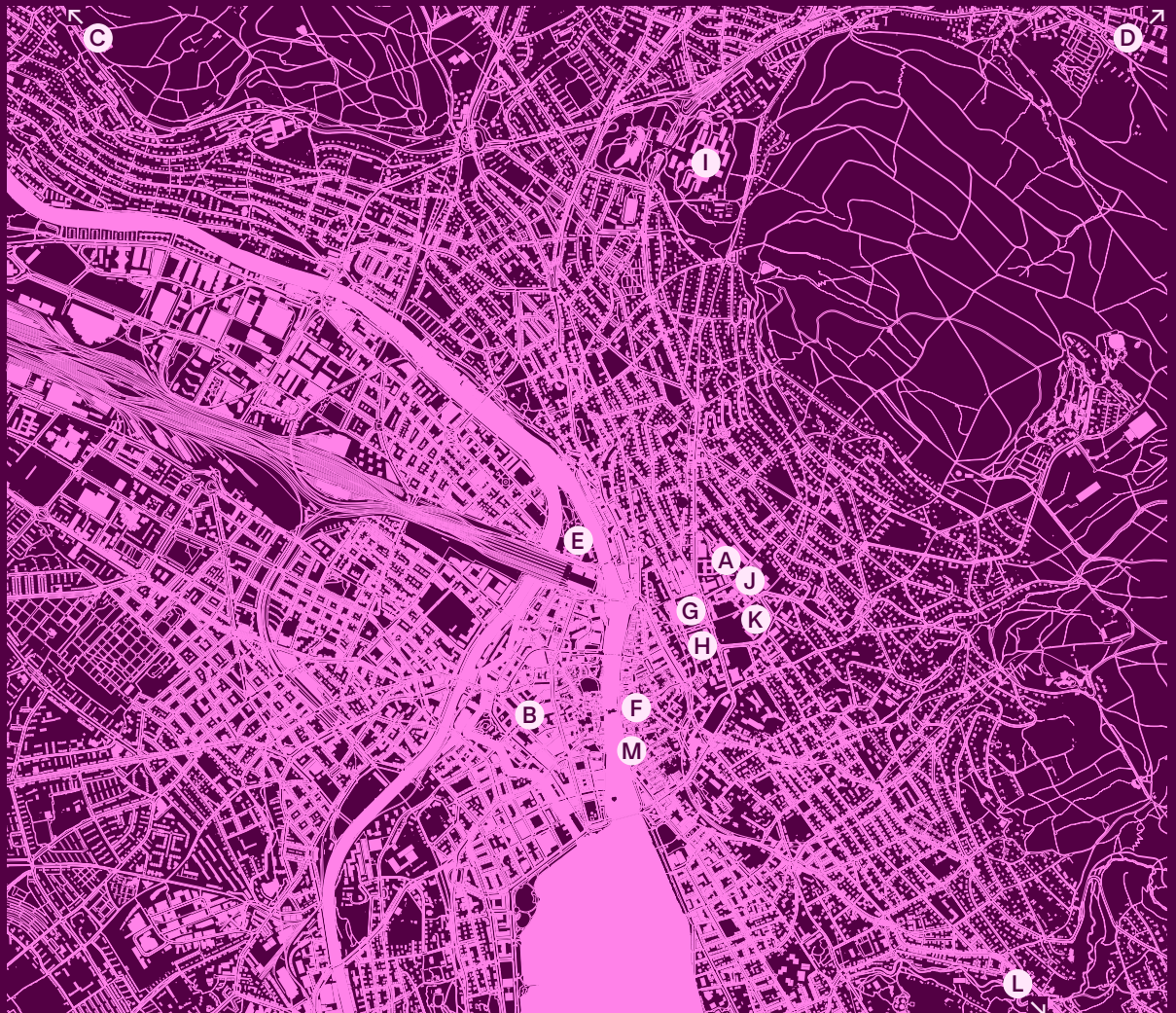
Event Statistics

Fellow Year 2024–2025



22 Partner Institutions and 13 Locations

- A** Collegium Helveticum
- B** Filmpodium
- C** Gramazio Kohler Research, ETH Zurich
- D** Kulturhaus Obere Stube
- E** Landesmuseum Zurich
- F** Literaturhaus Zürich
- G** Main building, ETH Zurich
- H** MaP Doctoral School, ETH Zurich
- I** NADEL, ETH Zurich
- J** Natural History Museum, University of Zurich
- K** Theater Neumarkt
- L** University Hospital Zurich
- M** University of Lausanne
- N** University of Zurich
- O** CHESS – Center for Higher Education and Science Studies, UZH
- P** Villa Garbald
- Q** Visiting Professorship for French Literature and Culture, ETH Zurich
- R** Wasserkirche
- S** Zurich Art Weekend
- T** Zürich liest
- U** ISEK – Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies, UZH
- V** Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design, DE
- W** Zurich's Long Night of Museums
- X** Raedli
- Y** Science Pavilion UZH
- Z** Solar Observation Tower



“I deeply appreciate the care and attention to detail that define the Collegium, as well as the dedication each person contributes to making it such an extraordinary place.”



Ettore Camerlenghi
Behavioral ecology
Early-Career Fellow 2024–2025

Academic and Artistic Life

Space and Time for Exchange

As members of the Collegium community, fellows are actively involved in academic life and have ample opportunities to exchange thoughts and ideas with each other, for instance, at weekly seminars, site visits, or through the program of events convened by the fellows. The Semper Observatory, located in the heart of Zurich's university district, serves as a place for work and study, offering both time and space to interact and exchange ideas with one another.

Formats organized by the Collegium

The Collegium facilitates exchange between fellows across disciplines and provides protected time and space for individual projects. The following describes the range of discussion formats and events.

Workshop Discussions

Each week, an early-career or senior fellow presents their ongoing work followed by a discussion. It has become traditional to continue the conversation in an informal setting.

Fellows' Lunch Seminar

Fellows come together to identify topics of shared interest and discuss them over lunch. The discussions begin with short contributions from various fellows with different backgrounds. Throughout the year, groups of fellows take on the responsibility and organize Fellows' Lunch Seminar sessions around their shared interests.

Jour Fixe

Once a month, the fellows meet for lunch in the library of the Collegium. In the afternoon, the community makes a site visit or excursion to a location in or around Zurich to deepen the interdisciplinary discussion based on a shared experience. Over recent years, for example, fellows have visited art and lab spaces or explored areas of urban wilderness and film shooting locations.

Reading, Film, and Discussion Groups

Fellows are encouraged to discuss texts and topics of shared interest in smaller groups. The Collegium supports these initiatives by providing the necessary space and infrastructure.

Ludwik Fleck Lecture

For transdisciplinary research at the Collegium, Ludwik Fleck's thinking continues to be an important reference. Since 2006, the Ludwik Fleck Lecture has been delivered by an invited speaker who reflects on a topic related to the life and work of Ludwik Fleck. Past Ludwik Fleck lecturers include Lorraine Daston, Carlo Ginzburg, Michael Gordin, Bruno Latour, Annemarie Mol, Christian Drosten, and Naomi Oreskes.

Formats organized by the fellows

Early-career and senior fellows are encouraged to contribute to the Collegium's program by applying with an idea for an event which can be realized during their fellowship. They may deliver or organize a lecture, convene a meeting, workshop, symposium, or conference, or make use of the Collegium's exhibition spaces, but there are no specific limitations set by the Collegium. The diversity of projects, people, disciplines, and backgrounds is also reflected in the event program, with the Semper Observatory serving as a focal point where different audiences can join in the discussion. Each event is individual and organized around the fellows' interests and work. There is no single format to be applied to all events.

The event spaces

The fellows' events are usually open to the public. For workshops, conferences, panel discussions, film screenings, and the like—for an audience of up to seventy guests—the Collegium can offer the Meridian Hall as a venue for lectures or concerts. For events for a smaller audience of up to twenty people, the Rudolf Wolf Room provides a more intimate atmosphere. The Collegium also provides exhibition and performance spaces that create opportunities for dialogue across different fields, or exchange between arts and sciences. Most events take place in the event spaces of the Collegium. However, when it seems appropriate, they also take place elsewhere and help engage new audiences.



Meridian Hall



The Gallery, one of the two exhibition spaces at the Collegium. Pictured: *Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry* by Denise Bertschi.

“The *Jour Fixes* and their excursions were among the moments I enjoyed most during my time at the Collegium. I’ve always felt that research culture involves too much sitting, too much stasis. At the Collegium, walking during our excursions seemed to set thought itself in motion, whether on the way to another campus, beneath the ETH architecture faculty, or through the vibrant corridors of the Zurich University of the Arts. Exchanging ideas while moving alongside colleagues made them all the more alive.”

Jour Fixe
→ Details on page 44



Anna Elsner
Literature
Senior Fellow 2024–2025



Spotlight Ideas in Motion

Event Calendar

2024

September 7

A Night at the Observatory Zurich's Long Night of Museums

Guided tours and exhibitions in cooperation with ETH Library.

October 10–12

Repair, Prepare The Transformative Potential of the Arts and the Operationality of their Temporality

Annual conference by the doctoral program *Epistemologies of Aesthetic Practices*.
Venues: Zurich University of the Arts & Collegium Helveticum

October 24

Can We Dissociate the Work from the Author? A Conversation with Gisèle Sapiro

Convened by Senior Fellow Louis-Philippe Dalember. Part of the *Zürich liest* literature festival. In cooperation with the Visiting Professorship for French Literature and Culture at ETH Zurich.

November 8–9

Quantifying the Impact of Microbiome Dynamics on Anti-microbial Resistance

Workshop by Lisa Pagani, Roger Kouyos, Sonja Lehtinen, and Sebastian Bonhoeffer.

November 26–27

Visual Aspects of Political Communication and Digital Platforms

Workshop by Senior Fellow Jakob Ohme.

December 4

Terrestrial Ecosystems at Risk

Exploring the Critical Nexus of Land Use and Climate Change

Symposium by Senior Fellow Nikou Hamzehpour.

December 9

Decoding Zurich's Art Scene Unraveling Institutional Impact on Artistic Career Development

Panel discussion with Barbara Basting, Katharina Brandl, Arianna Gellini, Martina Huber, and Thomas Ruettimann. Moderated and convened by Early-Career Fellow Anna Luhovska.

December 17

Challenging Dichotomies in the Cultural and Social Aspects of Development Cooperation MAS Student Conference

Conference by NADEL MAS and former Early-Career Fellow Medinat Malefakis.

2025

January 13

Uncertainties in Climate and Weather Predictions From Modeling to Visualization

Workshop by Senior Fellow Tülin Kaman and Associate Fellow Renato Pajarola.

January 21–22

Navigating Generative AI in Education Risks, Rewards, and the Role of Explainability

Symposium by Early-Career Fellow Francesco Sovrano.

January 27–28

Sharing with the Devil The Story of Appropriation in an Indonesian Coffee Plantation, 1830s–2000s

Workshop by Senior Fellow Pujo Semedi Hargo Yuwono and Associate Fellow Annuska Derks.

February 14

Ministry for the Future Episode 1: Geoengineering

Theater performance with Claudia Mohr, Sandro Vattioni, and Thomas Stocker. In cooperation with Theater Neumarkt.
Venue: ETH Zurich, Campus Höggerberg

February 18–19

Drivers and Constraints in the Emergence of Multilevel Societies Toward a Unified Theory in the Animal Kingdom

Workshop by Early-Career Fellow Ettore Camerlenghi.

February 22

Can Beauty Save the World? Reflections on the Literature Festival's Theme of "Rich and Poor"

A reading by and conversation with Kim Thúy. Part of the *Days of International Literature*. In cooperation with Literaturhaus Zurich and the Visiting Professorship for French Literature and Culture, ETH Zurich.

March 4

Delimiting Medicine in Limitless Times

Workshop by Senior Fellow Bjørn Hofmann.

March 10

Cyclic Liquefaction in Granular Soils: Engineering and Science From Earthquakes to Micromechanics

Fellow Lecture by Senior Fellow Mahdi Taiebat.

March 18

Contemplating (Dis)Comfort in Humanitarian Spaces

Roundtable by Early-Career Fellow Bronte Alexander.

March 25–26

The Art and Science of Liquid Interfaces

Conference by Senior Fellow Moran Bercovici and Associate Fellow Lucio Isa. Co-sponsored by the MaP Doctoral School at ETH Zurich.

March 25–April 15

Interfacial Aesthetics From Earth to Space

Exhibition by Senior Fellow Moran Bercovici and Associate Fellow Lucio Isa. Co-sponsored by the MaP Doctoral School at ETH Zurich.

March 28 Ministry for the Future Episode 2: Extinction Theater performance with Dennis Hansen, Marionna Schlatter, Anita Narwani, and SPUN. In cooperation with Theater Neumarkt. Venue: Natural History Museum, University of Zurich	April 31 Modeling of Granular Materials Integrating Data, Computation, and Physics Symposium by Early-Career Fellow Danny van der Haven.	March 21 The Rise of Self-Driving Labs in Chemistry and Materials Science Autonomous Robotic Experimentation Workshop by Senior Fellow Milad Abolhasani.	June 13 Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry Dye, Photography, and Architecture Workshop by Early-Career Fellow Denise Bertschi.
March 31 Bodies in Science The Role of Human Bodies in Learning Abstract Scientific Concepts Panel discussion by Early-Career Fellow Charlotte Müller.	May 5 Why Facts Don't Speak for Themselves Ludwik Fleck Lecture by Naomi Oreskes. Venue: ETH Zurich	May 27 Boosting Computational Catalysis with Machine Learning Current Challenges, Limitations, and Opportunities Workshop by Senior Fellow Konstantinos Vogiatzis and Associate Fellow Markus Reiher.	June 13–July 11 Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry Exhibition by Early-Career Fellow Denise Bertschi.
April 8 Between Proximity and Distance Self-Chosen Death in Documentary Film Film screening and conversation with Tuki Jencquel, Outi Hakola, Marc Keller, and Senior Fellow Anna Magdalena Elsner. In cooperation with Filmpodium. Venue: Filmpodium, Zurich	May 13 AI Reimagined Sustainable Futures in the Digital Age Symposium by Senior Fellow Christoforos Moutafis and Associate Fellow Giacomo Indiveri.	June 2–July 11 Colors of (Colonial) Chemistry A Self-Guided Tour By Early-Career Fellow Denise Bertschi. Venue: heritage sites in ETH Zurich's main building	June 13–July 11 Under Construction Exhibition with Tibor Bielicky, Stefano Graziani, Marianne Mueller, and David K. Ross. Curated by Senior Fellow Reto Geiser. Venue: Solar observation tower, ETH Zurich
April 9 Endings and Meanings Existential Suffering in the 21st Century Conference by Senior Fellow Anna Magdalena Elsner and Marc Keller.	May 15 On Models in the Experimental Sciences With Examples from the Early History of Molecular Biology Lecture by Hans-Jörg Rheinberger.	June 3 Seeing is Believing Extreme Weather Events and Climate Action Panel discussion with Clair Barnes, Sabrina Weiss, Ishita Chakraborty, and Josh Ettinger. Moderated and convened by Early-Career Fellow Viktoria Cologna.	June 18 Luminous Links Encounters with Light in Science, Society, and the Senses Workshop by Senior Fellow Audrey Bowden.
April 11 Ministry for the Future Episode 3: Nomadism Theater performance with Federica Remondi, David Kostenwein, and Jan Freihardt. In cooperation with Theater Neumarkt. Venue: Wasserkirche, Zurich	May 15–16 The Future of Modeling Nature Workshop by Senior Fellows Corina Tarnita and Robert Pringle, and Director Sebastian Bonhoeffer.	June 4 Human Responses to Extreme Weather Events An Interdisciplinary Approach Workshop by Early-Career Fellow Viktoria Cologna.	June 20 Just Transitions Challenges and Opportunities of Necessary Change Panel discussion with Anthony Patt, Mun Summ Wong, Sascha Roesler, and Senior Fellow Naomi Clara Hanakata. Moderated by Lindsay Howe.
April 25 Ministry for the Future Episode 4: Foundation Theater performance with Janet Hering, Grace Ballor, Jürg Füssler, and Laurène Descamps. In cooperation with Theater Neumarkt.	May 19–20 Efficient? The History and Future of Architectural Performance Workshop by Early-Career Fellow Jean Souviron, Associate Fellow Laurent Stalder, and Guillaume Habert.		October 6 Towards an Economic History of Climate Change Workshop by Senior Fellow Grace Ballor.

“As an engineer by training, my life had always revolved around numbers, formulas, and machines—undergrad, industry work, PhD, and professorship, all within the engineering bubble. My year at the Collegium opened my eyes to the humanities and social sciences, fields I had never engaged with before. In a welcoming, nonjudgmental environment, I could ask basic questions without hesitation, and by the end of the year, I had gained a deep understanding and genuine appreciation for perspectives and disciplines that had previously been completely foreign to me.”



Moran Bercovici
Mechanical engineering
Senior Fellow 2024–2025



Spotlight Appreciating New Perspectives

Events at the Collegium

Engaging Different Audiences

Early-career fellow events

As part of their time at the Collegium, each early-career fellow has the opportunity to convene a cross-disciplinary event connected to their work. All events by the 2024–2025 early-career fellows are presented in their respective profile pages in the “Fellows First” chapter of this publication.

Senior fellow events

Senior fellows are invited to either deliver a lecture, invite a guest speaker, or host a cross-disciplinary event. The scope of these events is generally in proportion to the length of a senior fellow’s stay at the Collegium. The following is a list of all the events organized by the 2024–2025 senior fellows.

October 24, 2024, Conversation

Can We Dissociate the Work from the Author?

A Conversation
with Gisèle Sapiro

Convened by Senior Fellow Louis-Philippe Dalember. In cooperation with the Visiting Professorship for French Literature and Culture, ETH Zurich.

From Wagner and Heidegger to Polanski, Matzneff, and others, the question of the relationship between an author and their work has been at the core of many debates and scandals. Based on her book *Peut-on dissocier l’œuvre de l’auteur?* (Seuil, 2020; Points, 2024), the prominent French sociologist Gisèle Sapiro first addressed this question from a philosophical and socio-historical standpoint before analyzing some cases of contemporary scandals.

November 26–27, 2024, Workshop

Visual Aspects of Political Communication and Digital Platforms

Convened by Senior Fellow Jakob Ohme.

In the current milieu of political discourse, digital platforms have fundamentally altered the modalities of political communication. Visual content on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok has become central to political messaging, significantly impacting public opinion and electoral behaviors. This two-day workshop brought together scholars from multiple fields to explore the evolving challenges and opportunities within the current landscape of visual political communication in contemporary political spheres.

December 4, 2024, Symposium

Terrestrial Ecosystems at Risk Exploring the Critical Nexus of Land Use and Climate Change

Convened by Senior Fellow Nikou Hamzehpour.

Deforestation and severe land degradation, especially in the Global South, have been accelerating greenhouse gas and particulate emissions. This symposium addressed land degradation as a key consequence of climate change and land-use change, focusing on its effects on atmospheric dynamics, dust patterns, and soil erosion. Through multidisciplinary discussions and case studies, it aimed to develop sustainable strategies to mitigate these interconnected environmental challenges. As an outcome of this symposium, a special issue titled “Advances in Soil Salinity Assessment and Management Under Changing Climate Conditions” was launched with the journal *Geoderma Regional*.

January 13, 2025, Workshop

Uncertainties in Climate and Weather Predictions From Modeling to Visualization

Convened by Senior Fellow Tülin Kaman and Associate Fellow Renato Pajarola.

Predicting the complex and chaotic dynamics of extreme weather events and climate systems is among the most important as well as challenging problems in the scientific community. Quantifying uncertainties in models and the effect of initial and boundary conditions play a crucial role in achieving an accurate representation of the weather and climate systems. Bringing together atmospheric scientists, applied mathematicians, and computer scientists, this workshop addressed uncertainties in climate projections, atmospheric dynamics, and the visualization of high-resolution extreme weather simulations and big data.

January 27–28, 2025, Workshop

Sharing with the Devil The Story of Appropriation in an Indonesian Coffee Plantation, 1830s–2000s

Convened by Senior Fellow Pujo Semedi Hargo Yuwono and Associate Fellow Annuska Derks.

This workshop focused on Pujo Semedi Hargo Yuwono’s current book manuscript, in which he explores the appropriation of company assets by workers at the Sumber-telung coffee plantation in Java, Indonesia, beginning from the plantation’s establishment in 1875 through to the 2000s. Conceptualizing plantations as dual spaces, as arenas of production and sites of wealth distribution, Pujo examines the tension between the owners’ drive for accumulation and the workers’ and managers’ demands for resource sharing.

Delimiting Medicine in Limitless Times

Convened by Senior Fellow Bjørn Hofmann.

Medicine has expanded significantly in recent times. Yet, while scientific discoveries and technological innovations offer numerous possibilities, resources remain limited. How can we prevent the decline of medicine after its remarkable rise? And how should its boundaries be defined? Combining a lecture by Bjørn Hofmann and input from Tanja Krones from the Institute of Biomedical Ethics and History of Medicine at the University of Zurich, this workshop explored whether refocusing medicine on the goal of alleviating pain, dysfunction, and suffering could serve as a meaningful way to define its limits.

March 10, 2025, Fellow Lecture

Cyclic Liquefaction in Granular Soils: Engineering and Science From Earthquakes to Micromechanics

Lecture by Senior Fellow Mahdi Taiebat.

In his Fellow Lecture, Mahdi Taiebat presented a modeling-focused overview of cyclic liquefaction in granular soils, beginning with phenomena observed during earthquakes. With a primary emphasis on discrete element modeling (DEM), the lecture highlighted recent micromechanical findings on granular soil behavior under cyclic loading. Insights from such modeling approaches have significant implications for safer infrastructure design and improved disaster resilience. By integrating practical engineering perspectives with advanced micromechanical science, the lecture thus aimed to inspire further exploration and innovation in understanding, modeling, and mitigating liquefaction hazards.

The Art and Science of Liquid Interfaces

Convened by Senior Fellow Moran Bercovici and Associate Fellow Lucio Isa. Co-sponsored by the MaP Doctoral School at ETH Zurich.

Fluid interfaces represent a frontier in both scientific research and artistic exploration, offering profound insights into complex physical interactions and aesthetic possibilities. This conference brought together experts in physics, chemistry, biology, and engineering to advance our fundamental understanding of liquid behavior. The event integrated scientific rigor with artistic innovation, and included both scientific presentations and artistic exhibits—all on the topic of liquid interfaces.

March 25–April 15, 2025, Exhibition

Interfacial Aesthetics From Earth to Space

Curated by Senior Fellow Moran Bercovici and Associate Fellow Lucio Isa. Co-sponsored by the MaP Doctoral School, ETH Zurich.

Accompanying the conference *The Art and Science of Liquid Interfaces*, this exhibition featured two innovative works that explore the artistic and scientific possibilities of liquid interfaces: *Cosmodernism—The Abstract Beauty of Liquid Interfaces* by Kamil Czapiga and *LiquiFab—Crafting with Liquids in Weightlessness* by Technion researchers. Together, these works challenge our understanding of materiality, structure, and the interplay between science and art, offering a fascinating glimpse into the creative potential of liquid interfaces. The exhibition was selected for the Venice Architecture Biennale, participating in the European Cultural Centre's *Time Space Existence* exhibition, which ran from May to November 2025.

April 8, 2025, Film screening and conversation

Between Proximity and Distance Self-Chosen Death in Documentary Film

With Tuki Jencquel and Outi Hakola. Convened by Senior Fellow Anna Magdalena Elsner and Marc Keller. In cooperation with Filmpodium Zurich. Venue: Filmpodium Zurich

Films play a crucial role in shaping political and social debates on assisted dying, rendering abstract ethical dilemmas palpable through compelling stories and powerful imagery. As an opening event to the conference *Endings and Meanings*, this screening presented the Swiss premiere of *Jackie the*

Wolf (2023), a documentary by Tuki Jencquel, which follows the filmmaker's mother, a healthy Frenchwoman preparing for her assisted death. The screening was followed by a panel discussion with Jencquel, film scholar Outi Hakola, and literary scholar Marc Keller, reflecting on documentary cinema's power to shape ethical, cultural, and political debates on assisted dying. Open to the public, the event aimed to extend conversations on end-of-life care and highlight the role of the arts in fostering these vital discussions.

April 9, 2025, Conference

Endings and Meanings Existential Suffering in the 21st Century

Convened by Senior Fellow Anna Magdalena Elsner and Marc Keller.

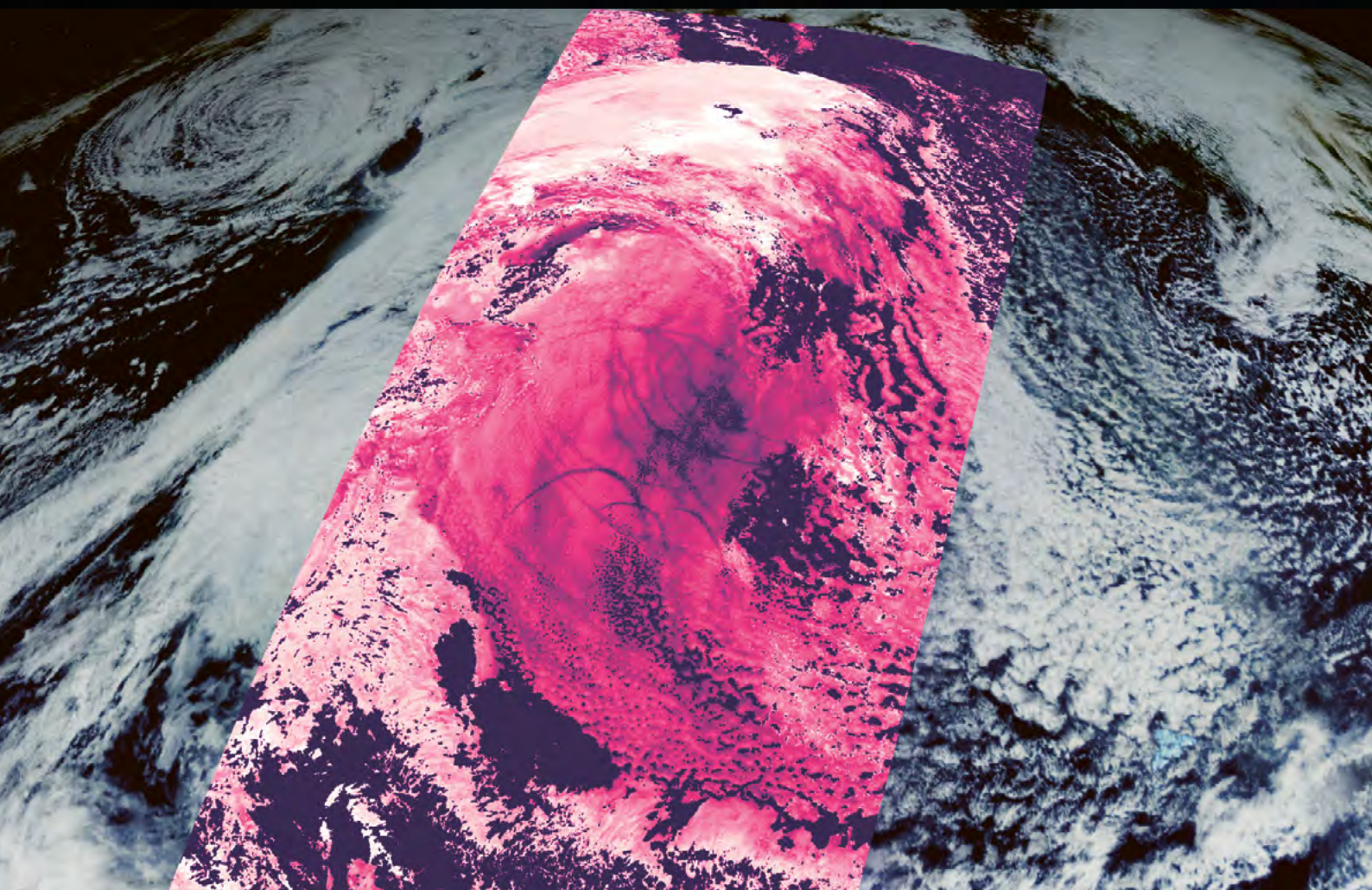
Over the last decades, a number of countries have legalized some form of assisted dying on the basis of a terminal medical diagnosis. A significant issue, however, remains in the phenomenon of “existential suffering”—a wish to die arising not from illness but from the belief that life has lost its meaning. In collaboration with the Assisted Lab, this symposium gathered scholars from medical ethics, cultural studies, law, and the social sciences to examine “existential suffering.” Drawing on cases debated by courts and parliaments, as well as works like *Gott* (2020) and *Jackie the Wolf* (2023), participants explored its cultural representation, ethical implications, and legal impact.

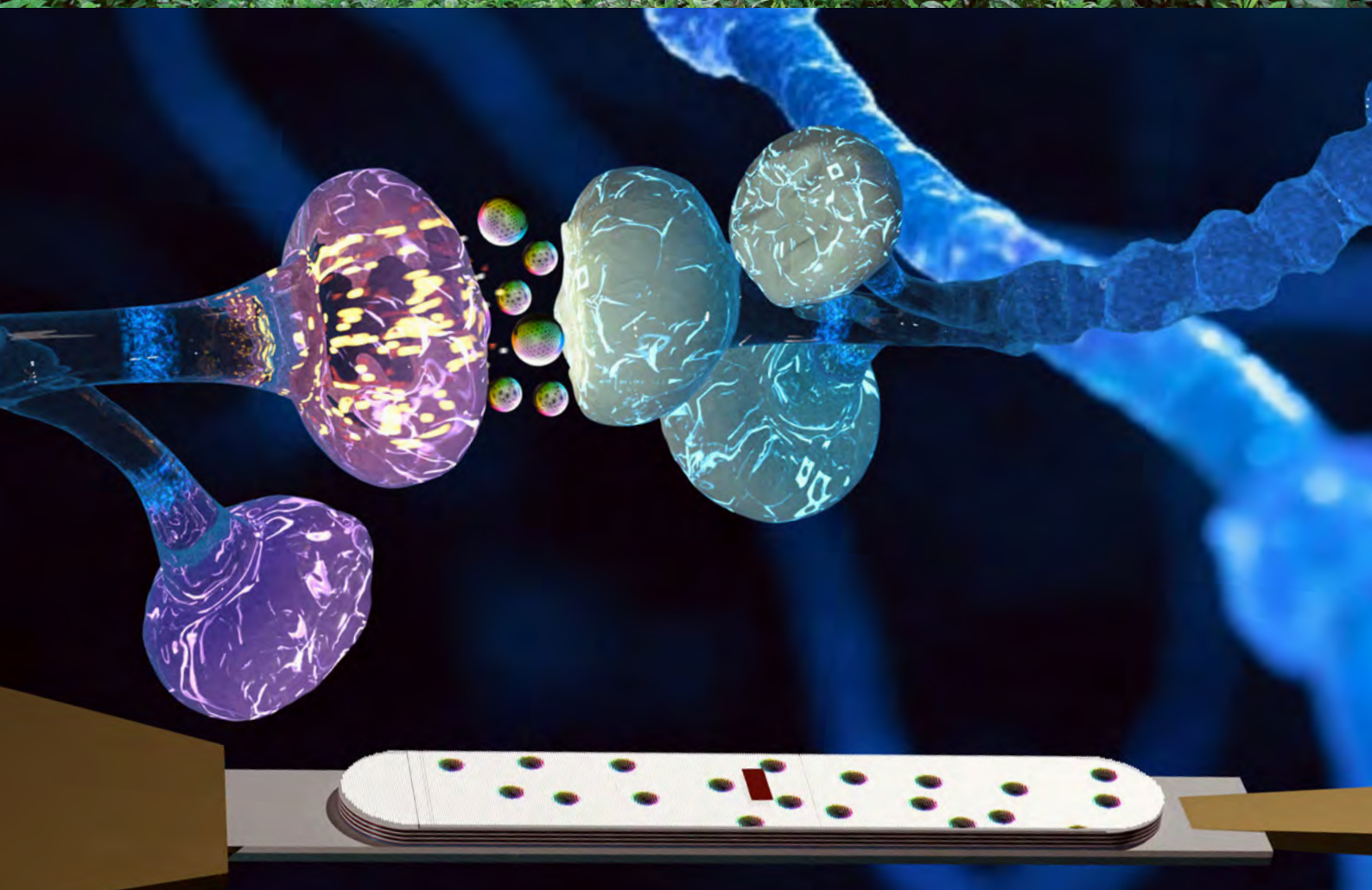
May 13, 2025, Symposium

AI Reimagined Sustainable Futures in the Digital Age

Convened by Senior Fellow Christoforos Moutafis and Associate Fellow Giacomo Indiveri.

As AI systems become more powerful and widespread, critical questions arise about their long-term environmental, societal, and ethical impacts. This interdisciplinary event invited its participants to join voices from neuroscience, computer science, and industry in rethinking the foundations of intelligent systems. From neuromorphic hardware and nature-inspired computation to responsible AI design and the hidden environmental costs of large-scale models, the symposium combined short, engaging talks with a public panel discussion to spark dialogue across disciplines and highlight pathways toward energy-efficient and socially responsible AI.





May 15–16, 2025, Workshop

The Future of Modeling Nature

Convened by Senior Fellows Corina Tarnita and Robert Pringle, and Director Sebastian Bonhoeffer.

Toy models are simplified representations of complex systems, frequently used in evolutionary biology and ecology to describe processes such as mutation, selection, genetic drift, or the dynamics of interacting populations. In the history of evolutionary biology and ecology, toy models have proven valuable during key moments of conceptual development. As we may now be entering a phase of less conceptual dynamism, will these models continue to serve the same purpose in the future, or will their relevance diminish? The goal of this workshop was to discuss the past contributions and future potential of models across various fields of biology.

May 21, 2025, Workshop

The Rise of Self-Driving Labs in Chemistry and Materials Science

Autonomous Robotic Experimentation

By Senior Fellow Milad Abolhasani.

The current rise of self-driving laboratories—intelligent, autonomous platforms capable of performing thousands of experiments daily—is dramatically accelerating the pace of innovation in chemistry and materials science. Against this backdrop, this transdisciplinary workshop brought together researchers from chemistry, chemical engineering, mechanical engineering, and materials science. Together, they explored how AI and robotics are transforming experimental research, fostering dialogue on challenges and opportunities for democratizing autonomous labs.

May 27, 2025, Workshop

Boosting Computational Catalysis with Machine Learning

Current Challenges, Limitations, and Opportunities

Convened by Senior Fellow Konstantinos Vogiatzis and Associate Fellow Markus Reiher.

This workshop brought together experts in computational catalysis and machine learning to exchange ideas, discuss current challenges, and explore opportunities for advancing catalysis via state-of-the-art computational methods. Six invited speakers gave lectures on diverse topics related to computational catalysis and machine learning. The workshop also included a panel discussion and an audience Q&A. Key outcomes of the workshop have been synthesized into a forthcoming perspective article outlining a roadmap for future developments.

June 13–July 11, 2025, Exhibition

Under Construction

With Tibor Bielicky, Stefano Graziani, Marianne Mueller, and David K. Ross.
Curated by Senior Fellow Reto Geiser.
Venue: Solar Observation Tower, ETH Zurich

On view at the former solar observation tower next to the Collegium's main building, this place of stasis and halt formed an inverse backdrop to display pictures of building sites that freeze construction in perpetual progress. The installation showcased the work of four photographers—Tibor Bielicky, Stefano Graziani, Marianne Mueller, and David K. Ross—to reflect on building sites as social artifacts and as places of cultural, political, and economic actions, rather than as mere ephemeral necessity in the process toward what is recognized as architecture.

June 18, 2025, Workshop

Luminous Links

Encounters with Light in Science, Society, and the Senses

Convened by Senior Fellow Audrey Bowden.

Light shapes our lives in ways we often overlook—influencing perception, guiding behavior, impacting health, and shaping the environments we inhabit. This workshop showcased the role of light in various disciplines, bringing together experts from neuroscience, space exploration, ecology, urban studies, and sensory science to explore how light operates across scales. It aimed to expose the audience to new experiences and

ideas where light takes prominence, and to dialogue on how such an understanding affects their own perceptions.

June 20, 2025, Panel discussion

Just Transitions

Challenges and Opportunities of Necessary Change

With Anthony Patt, Mun Summ Wong, and Sascha Roesler. Moderated by Lindsay Howe, convened by Senior Fellow Naomi Clara Hanakata.

The global urgency to mitigate climate change necessitates a profound transformation from fossil-fuel-based energy systems to low-carbon alternatives. This shift is not only a technological challenge, but also a socio-economic and ethical one. This symposium explored what implications transitions to sustainable systems entail and how they can be designed to uphold principles of justice. Participants from academia and practice presented and discussed critical components, and challenges inherent in urban/energy transitions, and the roles of design, governance, and public engagement in shaping equitable pathways.

October 6, 2025, Workshop

Towards an Economic History of Climate Change

Convened by Senior Fellow Grace Ballor.

This workshop brought together a multidisciplinary group of social scientists to examine how key economic actors—including business organizations, insurers and reinsurers, banks, and institutions of transnational governance located primarily in Europe—have responded to natural disasters, environmental challenges, and climate change. Participants explored issues such as governance and policy design, investment in mitigation and adaptation, or the contested responsibility for environmental and climate costs. Alongside, a roundtable asked why and how scholars, especially historians, can move methodologically toward an economic history of climate change.

Ludwik Fleck Lecture

Each year, the Collegium invites a distinguished scholar to deliver the annual Ludwik Fleck Lecture. With this lecture, the Collegium honors the life and work of Ludwik Fleck. A pioneering microbiologist and philosopher of science, Fleck was persecuted by the Nazis and survived two concentration camps. In 2005, the Collegium received what remained of his research materials together with other papers related to his life and work. Today, these materials are available through the Archives of Contemporary History at ETH Zurich.



May 5, 2025, Ludwik Fleck Lecture

Why Facts Don't Speak for Themselves

Lecture by Naomi Oreskes.
Venue: ETH Zurich

Many of us—and certainly many scientists—were raised to believe that facts speak for themselves. “Facts are facts,” it is often said. As a result, many believe it suffices to do science—understood as work conducted within the scientific community and published in peer-reviewed journals. Historians, philosophers, and sociologists of science—including, famously, Ludwik Fleck—have long pointed out how much effort is required to establish a “fact,” even within an expert community. Significant further challenges arise when facts move from the expert community where they originated into the public sphere. For one, peer-reviewed science is rarely accessible to the general public. Instead, they rely on derivative sources—primarily social media and

websites—where misinformation and disinformation are rampant. Compounding this issue, certain industries such as tobacco and fossil fuels have, for decades, deliberately promoted disinformation and sown doubt about well-established facts for economic and ideological reasons.

In this context, we must acknowledge that facts do not speak for themselves; someone must always speak for them. Given this reality, scientific communities and their allies must find effective ways to communicate facts, recognizing that because facts do not inherently speak for themselves, science communication must be taken more seriously.

During her stay at the Collegium, Naomi Oreskes gave interviews to *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), *Republik*, *Tagesanzeiger*, and *Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen* (SRF). In these conversations, she discussed the current state of US science, including the Trump administration's cuts to research funding and the growing pressures on institutions such as Harvard. She emphasized the need for science to remain independent and aligned with public needs.

Other events

In the spirit of engaging different audiences, the Collegium also cooperates with partner institutions to facilitate events both in the observatory and across the city of Zurich.

September 7, 2024, Exhibition

A Night at the Observatory Zurich's Long Night of Museums

With guided tours by ETH Library staff, exhibits of art works by Thomas Peter and former fellow Paulo Wirz, and an open-air bar by raedli. In cooperation with ETH Library and raedli.

During Zurich's Long Night of Museums, people were able to visit the Semper Observatory and learn about the scholarly past and present of this scientific landmark. Installations and exhibitions, including videos and a table full of free books, showed how cutting-edge research is presently created and made available to the public at the Collegium Helveticum. Meanwhile, a guided tour by ETH Library staff talked about the groundbreaking astronomical research that was carried out here in the past, at the former Federal Observatory in Zurich. In the courtyard, raedli bar served drinks to guests enjoying the unique atmosphere of the observatory in the glow of the night.

November 8–9, 2024, Workshop

Quantifying the Impact of Microbiome Dynamics on Antimicrobial Resistance

Convened by Lisa Pagani, Roger Kouyos, Sonja Lehtinen, and Sebastian Bonhoeffer.

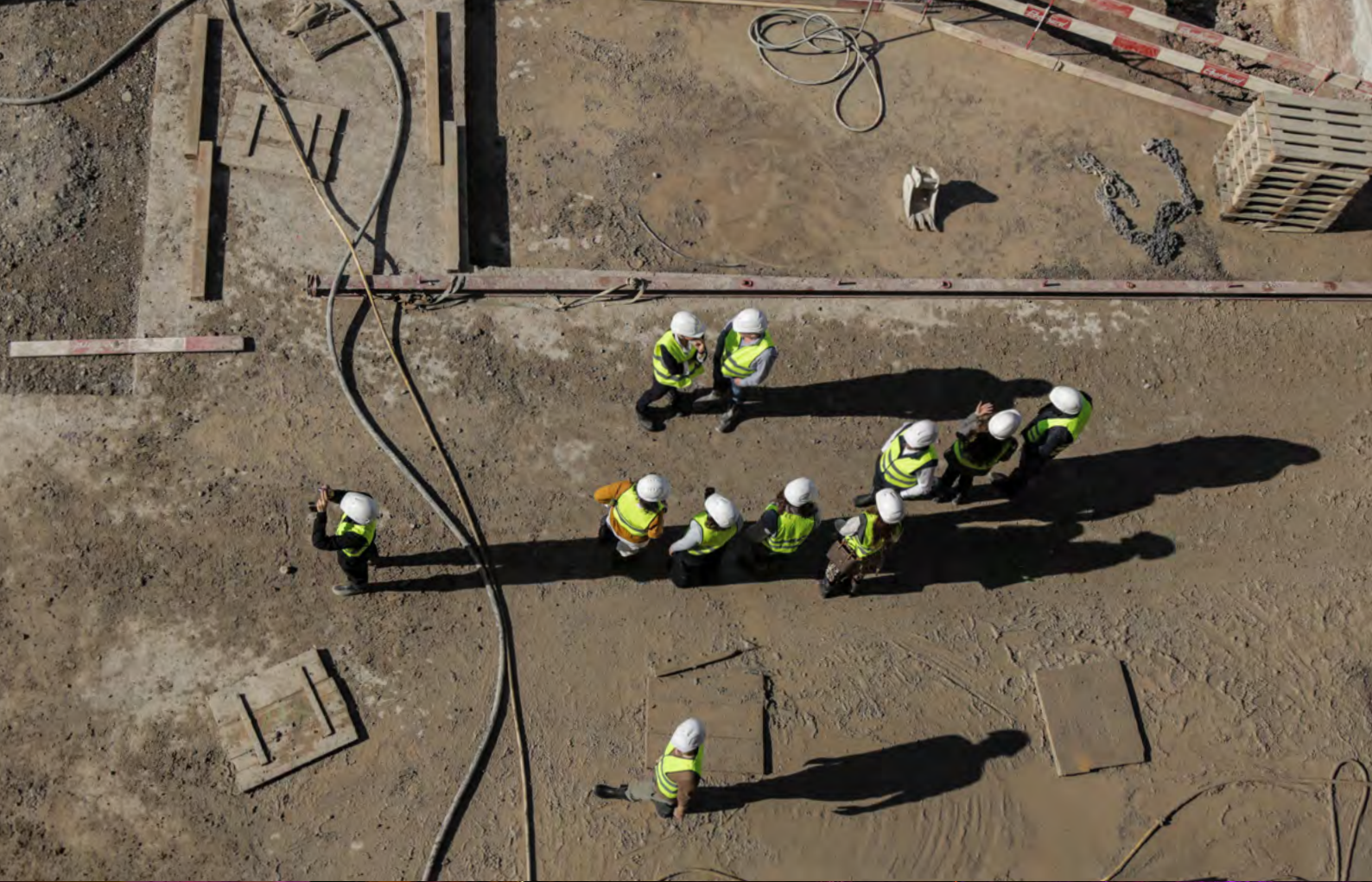
The human microbiome is a complex ecosystem with profound implications for human health. While it provides numerous benefits, it also harbors antibiotic-resistant bacteria, posing challenges for public health and medicine. With increasing antibiotic use, the selective pressure on microbial communities amplifies the prevalence and persistence of resistant strains. This workshop focused on the role of mathematical modeling in understanding and predicting antibiotic resistance dynamics within the microbiome.

December 17, 2024, Conference

Challenging Dichotomies in the Cultural and Social Aspects of Development Cooperation MAS Student Conference

Convened by the NADEL MAS 2024–2026 cohort and former Early-Career Fellow Medinat Malefakis.

International development cooperation is shaped by historical inequalities such as slavery, colonialism, and unequal power dynamics. Such inequalities continue to perpetuate cultural and social insensitivities and increase the lack of accountability in development cooperation. These and other related issues were critically examined at this student conference by NADEL's MAS in Global Cooperation and Sustainable Development.



February 14–April 25, 2025, Theater performance

Ministry for the Future

In cooperation with Theater Neumarkt. Conceived by Yael Borofsky, Georgia Drew, Charlotte Müller, Eneas N. Prawdzic, Julia Reichert, Sascha Ö. Soydan, Linus Truninger, and Mario Wimmer. Production design by HFG Karlsruhe. Dramaturgy and production by Theater Neumarkt (Julia Reichert, Eneas N. Prawdzic, Linus Truninger).

→Learn more about this collaborative project in the interview “Rehearsing the Future” on pages 59–62.

How will our near climate future look? Science fiction author Kim Stanley Robinson’s novel *The Ministry for the Future* has been celebrated as a science-based yet hopeful answer to this question, appealing to politicians and the public alike. Set in a near future that feels alarmingly close, the novel follows the efforts of a fictional UN institution based in Zurich that tackles the devastating impacts of climate change.

Zurich’s Theater Neumarkt and the Collegium Helveticum took the fictional founding year of Robinson’s Ministry as an opportunity to discuss important climate change issues within scenarios expected in 2034. Involving different experts for each episode, and including a “citizens’ assembly” of audience members in the discussion, the theater staged a four-part live series that envisioned Zurich in the near future:

February 14, 2025

Episode 1: Geoengineering

With experts Claudia Mohr, Sandro Vattioni, and Thomas Stocker.
Venue: ETH Zurich, Campus Höggerberg

The date is February 14, 2034. With temperatures rising, geoengineering has been both condemned and hailed as a possible solution. To lay the groundwork, Yram, the minister of the Ministry for the Future, convened a hearing at ETH Höggerberg to ask: Could geoengineering become the cornerstone of a brighter, more resilient future—or are the critics right when they say that technology won’t save us?

March 28, 2025

Episode 2: Extinction

With experts Dennis Hansen, Marionna Schlatter, Anita Narwani, and SPUN (Society for the Protection of Underground Networks).
Venue: Natural History Museum, University of Zurich

Of all the worrisome developments related to climate change, biodiversity loss is by far the most irreversible. Charismatic megafauna and over-ground life have caught the public attention, but what about the hidden and underground agents? Caught in political tensions between the carbon lobby and eco-activists, Minister Yram held a hearing on behalf of our oft-forgotten climate allies: mycorrhizal fungal networks and algae, the planet’s unsung carbon recyclers and oxygen producers.

April 11, 2025

Episode 3: Nomadism

With experts Federica Remondi, David Kostenwein, and Jan Freihardt.
Venue: Wasserkirche, Zurich

In 2032 and 2033, the whole Alpine region suffered catastrophic 1,000-year floods, forcing hundreds of thousands—including Zurich residents—to evacuate. Alpine governments turned to the Ministry and its invited experts for guidance. How likely is another flood in 2034? Should flood risk maps determine where people are allowed to live? Could the future of residence in flood-prone areas involve seasonal migration, adopting a nomadic way of life? And if so, where should people relocate?

April 25, 2025

Episode 4: Foundation

With experts Janet Hering, Grace Ballor, Jürg Füssler, and Laurene Descamps.

In the final episode, the setting returned to the present—standing at the brink of what could be the foundation of a real Ministry for the Future. At the Collegium, insights from the previous episodes were gathered, bringing together activists, policymakers, and entrepreneurs. Looking backward, forward, and beyond, we asked: What does it truly mean to take Robinson’s vision seriously? Is an international institution the right tool for the challenge? And how do we take the first steps toward making it a reality?

February 22, 2025, Conversation and reading

Can Beauty Save the World? Reflections on the Literature Festival’s Theme of “Rich and Poor”

A reading by and conversation with Kim Thúy. Part of the *Days of International Literature*. In cooperation with the Visiting Professorship for French Literature and Culture, ETH Zurich and Literaturhaus Zurich.
Venue: Literaturhaus Zurich

In this conversation, author Kim Thúy shared her reflections on the festival’s central theme of “Rich and Poor.” Kim spent her early years in Vietnam before fleeing to Canada with her parents in 1978. Her debut book, *Ru* (2009; English: *The Sound of Foreignness*, 2013), recounts her experiences as the child of a wealthy family in Vietnam, her forced expulsion and escape, life in a Malaysian refugee camp, and, ultimately, her arrival in Canada.

May 15, 2025, Lecture

On Models in the Experimental Sciences With Examples from the Early History of Molecular Biology

Lecture by Hans-Jörg Rheinberger.

The concept of “model” in the sciences encompasses many meanings and facets, making it essential to define the context in which the term is used. In this lecture, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, historian of science, molecular biologist, and former director of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, focused on one specific context: empirical experimentation. After outlining a basic framework for conceptualizing scientific experimentation, he explored how modeling fits within this structure by drawing on examples from the early history of molecular biology.

“The *Jour Fixes* weren’t just great because of the wonderful new places and experiences we got to share together, but also because of the food. Once a month, we were welcomed with dishes that delighted both the eyes and the taste buds—everyone was eager to discover what surprise awaited us this time.

The intimate setting in the library created space for genuine conversation with colleagues, both new and familiar, making the *Jour Fixes* especially memorable. For me, it was also a beautiful example of how thoughtful and caring the Collegium staff were in ensuring the very best experience for the fellows.”

Jour Fixe
→ Details on page 44



Audrey Bowden
Biomedical engineering
Senior Fellow 2024–2025



Spotlight Thoughtful and Caring

“The Collegium generates the momentum that is essential for the development of an academic career.”



Jean Souvion
Architecture
Early-Career Fellow 2024–2025

Rehearsing the Future

An Experimental Encounter Between Science and Theater

In spring 2023, the Collegium and Theater Neumarkt embarked on an experiment: a “science and theater performance” inspired by Kim Stanley Robinson’s climate novel *The Ministry for the Future*. Instead of staging a conventional adaptation, they created a new theatrical form in which scientists and theater-makers worked side by side. The audience became part of a fictive citizens’ assembly advising the ministry in the year 2034, debating how to respond to biodiversity loss, climate migration, geoengineering, and the broader question of what kinds of cooperation might be needed to confront the climate crisis. Over four episodes, expert knowledge intertwined with performative disruption, producing moments when the future felt uncannily close.

The scenography, designed by students from the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (HfG Karlsruhe) under the direction of Constanze Fischbeck, set the stage for immersion, helping audiences to step into this imagined near future. Audiences eagerly embraced the experiment, with every episode selling out weeks in advance.

What began as speculative fiction quickly echoed real-world events: species had been vanishing, floods had struck Switzerland, and political inertia seemed difficult to overcome. After the final episode, the group gathered at the Collegium to reflect on this cooperation between arts and sciences. Their conversation reflects the process around the unexpected ways in which theater and science can learn from each other when they share a stage.

Beginnings

Julia Reichert: I think the project had already started on the day Kim Stanley Robinson visited the Collegium. At that moment, two threads came together: my long-standing admiration for the Collegium as a place of openness, and my fascination with Robinson's book, which a director had already urged me to think about staging. When Robinson came to Zurich, it felt like a window opened.

Mario Wimmer: I agree, his presence made the urgency of his book tangible, and Julia suggested creating a performance around it. I was open from the very beginning but wanted to find a way to involve fellows and experts in meaningful ways.

Julia: And we decided to invent a new format, mixing expert hearings with theatrical interventions. What I loved from the start was the idea of creating a space where disciplines could meet on an equal footing.

"It was humbling, but also energizing to see data turned into something people might actually remember." Georgia Drew

Georgia Drew: I found this idea fascinating. I had done some science communication before, but always in visual or written form, never in theater. Suddenly I had to present facts about microbes or ecosystems—not to colleagues, but to an audience who would immediately see them reframed, dramatized, sometimes even disrupted. It was humbling, but also energizing to see data turned into something people might actually remember.

Charlotte Müller: I'm a chemist, and honestly had no connection to theater before. But when the invitation

came, I thought this was an opportunity I might never have again. What struck me was how quickly the project encouraged us to be malleable in our thinking, which stood in contrast to my usual analytical and systematic approach. That was new to me, and it was challenging but also liberating.

Eneas N. Prawdzic: As part of the theater group *Probe-raum Zukunft*, I have been developing pre-enactment formats for years—staged assemblies where we rehearse events that could one day become reality. Robinson's book is a perfect match. In the near future, the international community sets up a Ministry for the Future in Zurich, tasked with tackling the climate crisis. This local connection, together with Robinson's vivid narrative, offered an ideal starting point for our interdisciplinary team and for imagining how civil society, working alongside renowned experts and even politicians, might confront the urgent climate challenges of the future.

Process

Sascha Ö. Soydan: Climate change is a tough topic, but like we said at the first hearing: This isn't doomsday. We agreed early on that we didn't want to moralize. At first I was overwhelmed by all the facts. My task was to find an emotional thread for the audience and that wasn't easy. Instead, we tried to stay factual and speak from the heart, so people would really listen and reflect on their own role. I realized I was starting to think like a scientist—asking for evidence and clarity—while still trying to move people. In the end, it felt like we were opening minds, showing the beauty of the world and why it's worth protecting. I came in as an actor and left feeling half a scientist.

Linus Truninger: Coming from climate activism, I was used to protest and direct action. Here I saw a different





form of engagement. The audience itself became part of the council, voting and debating with us. And we also widened the idea of expertise. That mixture created a richer conversation than either side alone could have offered.

Mario: What mattered to me during this process was protecting the integrity of the experts. They had to remain credible scientists even while playing inside our fictional setting. That's why we built clear evidence-based scenarios for each episode, so they had a frame but not a script. For the first episode, we focused on getting the top experts on geoengineering, simply to avoid a generic discussion about climate change at large. However, I realized—also based on feedback we received—that for the following episodes it would be helpful to broaden the expert base to have a more balanced picture.

Julia: I was struck by how much the scientists threw themselves into the experiment. Some were hesitant at first, but many ended up embracing the futurist

role-play more than expected. The boundaries between us collapsed. Theater-makers began to think like scientists, and scientists became surprisingly playful.

Georgia: One example was the biodiversity episode. An expert proposed imagining the near-extinction of a key phytoplankton species. Scientifically it isn't gone yet, but if it were, the ocean's carbon pump would fail. And that would be a disaster for fisheries. To think about that in front of an audience, and to hear it staged, made the scenario much more vivid than any lecture could have.

Charlotte: Choosing experts wasn't just about their knowledge. It was about whether they could adapt to the rules of theater, to careful speculation, to improvisation. Many surprised me with how much they enjoyed it. I think for them, too, it was liberating to step outside their usual roles.

"It was never science versus art; it was everyone stepping into unfamiliar territory." Julia Reichert

Moments and lessons

Julia: Looking back, the time we spent together as a group was incredibly valuable. It helped us to understand how the others think, how they approach questions, and what reference points they use. But one lesson stood out even more: Real collaboration only works if you don't lock people into a rigid frame, but allow that frame to shift together. That effort is huge, but it can be transformative. It creates something you could never have planned. It was never science versus art; it was everyone stepping into unfamiliar territory. And that's where the energy came from.

Linus: I will never forget the first episode. An actor provoked the audience with controversial ideas, and suddenly the discussion took off on its own. People engaged, challenged the experts, and argued among themselves. It no longer needed us. That was the best proof that the format could work.

Eneas: For me, one of the strengths of this project was the interplay between moments that felt so real you could almost forget it was fiction, and poetic moments like this one: After a heated hearing in a lecture hall, the audience suddenly found themselves wandering in the dark among extinct creatures in the Natural History Museum. It was poetic and melancholic, but also strangely hopeful, as if by looking at the past, we might still be able to change the future.

"At some point I realized the collaboration simply worked. The process had taken on a life of its own, carrying us beyond what any of us could have individually scripted." Mario Wimmer

Mario: If I had to give advice to someone in my role, I'd say: Only do this if you're ready for an open-ended process. It takes time, patience, and can get messy. But

if you stay open, something larger begins to form collectively. At some point I realized the collaboration simply worked. The process had taken on a life of its own, carrying us beyond what any of us could have individually scripted. That's rare, and that's the real benefit.

Any concluding statements?

Sascha: My last words? Everything was surprising.

Conclusion

The collaboration between the Collegium and Theater Neumarkt became more than an adaptation of a novel; it was a rehearsal space for futures that are already arriving. The project tested how knowledge can be shared, challenged, and transformed. It showed that theater can make climate scenarios more tangible, while science can lend rigor to performance. Most of all, it revealed that between disciplines, in the unpredictable space where methods collide, new forms of action and understanding can emerge.

Participants in this conversation:

Julia Reichert

Co-Director, Theater Neumarkt

Eneas N. Prawdzic

Co-Director, Proberaum Zukunft

Linus Truninger

Production Assistance, Theater Neumarkt

Sascha Ö. Soydan

Actress, Theater Neumarkt

Georgia Drew

Early-Career Fellow 2023–2024,
Collegium Helveticum

Charlotte Müller

Early-Career Fellow 2024–2025,
Collegium Helveticum

Mario Wimmer

Deputy Director, Collegium Helveticum

All contributors:

Concept: Yael Borofsky (Collegium Helveticum), Georgia Drew, Charlotte Müller, Eneas N. Prawdzic, Julia Reichert, Sascha Ö. Soydan, Linus Truninger, Mario Wimmer; Production design created by students at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design under the supervision of Constanze Fischbeck: Birke Beyer, Bettina Bessenyei, Juhee Han, Emily Hugger, Luca Ihns, Josephine Leicht, Ewa Wasilewska, and Verena Zenker.

Episode One: Geoengineering

Experts: Claudia Mohr (Paul Scherrer Institute), Sandro Vattioni (ETH Zurich), Thomas Stocker (University of Bern); **Actor:** David Attenberger (Theater Neumarkt).

Episode Two: Extinction

Experts: Dennis Hansen (Natural History Museum, University of Zurich), Marionna Schlatter (Green Party of Switzerland), Anita Narwani (Eawag), SPUN (Society for the Protection of Underground Networks).

Episode Three: Nomadism

Experts: Federica Remondi (Swiss Re), David Kostenwein (ETH Zurich), Jan Freihardt (ETH Zurich); **Actor:** Sofia Borsani (Theater Neumarkt); Musical performance: Queerchor Schweiz.

Episode Four: Foundation

Experts: Grace Ballor (Collegium Helveticum & Bocconi University, IT), Laurene Descamps (One Planet Lab Switzerland), Jürg Füssler (INFRAS), Janet Hering (Eawag); **Sound artist:** Marcel Babazadeh (Atelier Klang und Raum).

→ See the detailed episode overview on page 56

Outlook & Updates

In September, the Collegium welcomed a new cohort of fellows who are carrying forward the intellectual energy of previous years. Their research and engagement sustain the cross-disciplinary dialogue that defines the Collegium and invite a wider public to join the conversation. With the launch of the open-access *Proceedings of the Collegium Helveticum*, the institute has created a platform for documenting events and for publishing fellows' working papers and preprints, ensuring that its activities remain permanently accessible to the public.

As the Collegium evolves, its advisory board remains central to shaping the institution's strategic development and strengthening its position as an institute for advanced study. Several new members will join the board, bringing in fresh perspectives while ensuring continuity in its composition and mission.

To support faculty from its supporting institutions, the Collegium has introduced a so-called Sabbatical-at-Home Fellowship. The program is open to faculty members of the Collegium's supporting institutions, with additional opportunities for ETH Zurich professors.

Finally, the Collegium is pleased to announce that Sebastian Bonhoeffer has been reappointed as director for another period through the end of 2028, ensuring continuity in leadership and strategic direction for the coming years.

“The workshop on multilevel societies, convened by Ettore Camerlenghi, was the first fellow-organized event I attended at the Collegium—and it set expectations very high. With an excellent line-up of speakers and a fascinating topic, fundamental ideas clearly bubbled to the surface throughout the day. Participating in it was both energizing and deeply rewarding.”



Corina Tarnita
Ecology and evolutionary biology
Senior Fellow 2024–2025

**Drivers and Constraints in the
Emergence of Multilevel Societies**
Toward a Unified Theory
in the Animal Kingdom
Workshop, January 18–19, 2025
→ Details on page 15



Spotlight Bubbling with Ideas

Current Fellows

The Community Continues to Grow



Fellowship year 2025–2026

With the beginning of the 2025–2026 fellowship year, the Collegium welcomed nine early-career and eight senior fellows—with more to join the cohort over the course of the year. While the fellows will all be pursuing their individual projects, they intersect in areas of shared interest such as “academic research and societal urgencies,” “cultural heritage and materiality,” “utopia or distopia,” and “nature as concept.”

On the Collegium’s website, you can find an overview of and further details on all of the 2025–2026 fellows, including short biographies and project descriptions. It also provides a list of the associate fellows who support the early-career and senior fellows and help the international fellows connect with Zurich’s academic and cultural community.

Early-Career Fellows



Churchill Agutu

Born 1993 in Kisumu, KE
PhD: ETH Zurich, CH (2023)
Energy technology
and development finance

Fellowship project

Foreign Exchange Risk
The Silent Obstacle to
Africa’s Energy Revolution

Associate fellow: Tobias Schmidt
Professor of Energy and Technology Policy,
ETH Zurich



Eveliina Hanski

Born 1993 in Kirkkonummi, FI
PhD: University of Oxford, UK
(2023)
Microbial ecology

Fellowship project

Unraveling the Role of
the Gut Microbiome in Aging

Associate fellows: Anna Lindholm
Adjunct Professor, Department of Evolutionary
Biology and Environmental Studies,
University of Zurich



Nils Hohmuth

Born 1988 in Bamberg, DE
PhD: Charité Berlin, DE (2025)
Planetary health

Fellowship project

Temperature-Related Mortality
of Global Deforestation

Associate fellow: Nicolas Gruber
Professor of Environmental Physics, ETH Zurich



Zainabu Jallo

Born in Jos, Plateau, NG
PhD: University of Bern, CH
(2022)
Anthropological criminology

Fellowship project

The Making of the Infrahuman
Criminal Anthropology
and its Objects

Associate fellow: Silvy Chakkalakal
Professor of Popular Cultures, University of Zurich



Nina Kerschbaumer

Born 1988 in Salzburg, AT
PhD: Academy of Fine Arts
Vienna, AT (2024)
Film

Fellowship project

Amok
Anatomy of the Normal

Associate fellow: Rosa Barba
Professor of Art in Space and Time, ETH Zurich



Anna (Anouk) Luhn

Born 1986 in Berlin, DE
PhD: Freie Universität Berlin, DE
(2020)
General and comparative
literature

Fellowship project

Electrified Language
Verbal Matters, Media
Revolutions, and Shifts of
Literacy (1900–Present)

Associate fellow: Sandro Zanetti
Professor of Comparative Literature,
University of Zurich



Alex John
Ntamatungiro

Born 1982 in Biharamulo, TZ
PhD: University of the
Witwatersrand, ZA (2024)
Biomedicine

Fellowship project

Adapting Sequencing
Approaches for Cost-Effective
HIV Drug Resistance
Monitoring in Tanzania

Associate fellows:
Michael Huber, Head of Diagnostics and
Development, Institute of Medical Virology,
University of Zurich
Roger Kouyos, Associate Professor at the Institute
of Medical Virology, University of Zurich and
University Hospital of Zurich



María Victoria Seca

Born 1986 in Mendoza, AR
PhD: National University of Cuyo,
AR (2021)
Sociology and youth studies

Fellowship project

Shaping Democracy?
Youth Activism, Political
Commitments, and Visions of
Democracy in a Changing World

Associate fellow: Hannah Werner
Assistant Professor of Political Science,
University of Zurich



Miles Timpe

Born 1988 in Seattle, US
PhD: University of Zurich, CH
(2020)
Astrobiology

Fellowship project

Under a False Moon
The Celestial Sphere
in the Anthropocene

Associate fellow: Gabriela Schaepman-Strub
Professor of Earth System Science, University of
Zurich

Senior Fellows



Jędrzej Białkowski

Professor of Finance
University of Canterbury, NZ
Finance

Fellowship project

Understanding the Complex Relationship between National Politics and Behavioral Finance

Associate fellow: **Thorsten Hens**
Professor of Financial Economics, University of Zurich



Hanna Barbara Hölling

Research Professor
Bern Academy of the Arts, CH
Art, heritage, and conservation studies

Fellowship project

Caring for Naturecultures

Associate fellow: **Philip Ursprung**
Professor of the History of Art and Architecture,
ETH Zurich



Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen

Professor of Practical Theology
University of Oslo, NO
Religious studies

Fellowship project

Digitalization of Religion

The Technology Religions Live By

Associate fellow: **Thomas Schlag**
Professor of Practical Theology, University of Zurich



Jill Johnson

Director of Dance, 2011–2021,
Harvard University, US
Dance and choreography

Fellowship project

Building Sustainable Structures for Artists

Associate fellow: **Jason Beechey**
Head of Dance, Zurich University of the Arts



Govind Kaigala

Associate Professor
of Biomedical Engineering
The University of British
Columbia, CA
Biomedical engineering

Fellowship project

Developing Microrobots to Deliver Cargo Spatially to Carcinomas

Associate fellow: **Bradley Nelson**
Professor of Robotics and Intelligent Systems,
ETH Zurich



Artem Mishchenko

Professor of Condensed
Matter Physics
The University of Manchester, UK
Condensed matter and quantum materials physics

Fellowship project

AI × Quantum Materials

Associate fellow: **Klaus Ensslin**
Professor of Solid-State Physics, ETH Zurich



Arna Olafsson

Associate Professor of Finance
Copenhagen Business School, DK
Financial economics

Fellowship project

Sustainable Household Finance

Associate fellow: **Steven Ongena**
Professor of Banking, University of Zurich



Viktoria Räuchle

Akademische Rätin
Ludwig Maximilian University
of Munich, DE
Classical archaeology

Fellowship project

Between Pathos and Distance Ironic Attitudes Towards Emotion in Ancient Art

Associate fellow: **Corinna Reinhardt**
Professor of Mediterranean Archaeology
with a focus on Greek and Roman Antiquity,
University of Zurich

“The fellowship provided the rare gift of dedicated time and space to reflect on my priorities as an academic and to develop a clear and purposeful vision for my future.”



Danny van der Haven
Materials science
Early-Career Fellow 2024–2025

Fellowships at the Collegium

Learning From Diverse Perspectives

Fellowships at the Collegium provide protected time to pursue individual research and the opportunity to participate in a vibrant and international community of fellows. In an increasingly complex world, we need both specialist knowledge and interdisciplinary cooperation to respond to the major challenges of our times. Therefore, the Collegium brings together fellows from all academic and artistic disciplines at different stages of their careers.

The Collegium Helveticum fellowship program is open to highly promising early-career researchers and artists as well as exceptional academics and artists who are already established in their careers. Based on the fellows' shared interests, the program invites cross-disciplinary exchange and dialogue. The Collegium values diversity and nurtures a fair and respectful work environment. Applications from all disciplines represented at the three supporting institutions are welcome—from the humanities and social sciences, the natural sciences, engineering, and technology to life sciences, medicine or the arts, architecture, and design. All fellows are encouraged to contribute to the Collegium's program by applying with an idea for an event they can realize during their fellowship.

If you are unsure whether the Collegium's program is a good fit for you, we encourage you to connect with past and current fellows for guidance and advice.

Early-career fellowships

Early-career fellowships are open to researchers at the postdoctoral level (within five years of academic age after completing a PhD) or art school graduates at an equivalent stage in their career (within five years of academic age after completing an MFA or equivalent). The notion of academic age considers, e.g., periods of care work or part-time employment. For details about academic age, please refer to the call for applications. The fellowship takes the form

of full-time employment at a postdoctoral salary at ETH Zurich. Since the Collegium cannot provide laboratory infrastructure or studio space, early-career fellows can negotiate with the directorship of the Collegium to allocate up to 40% of their time to work outside the Collegium if this is essential for the proposed project or furthers their skills in important ways.

We also encourage small interdisciplinary teams of up to three people to apply with a joint project. The Collegium is a family-friendly workplace. Therefore, joint research and task-sharing proposals will be considered.

Senior fellowships

Senior fellowships are open to established artists or academics who would like to become fellows at the Collegium during a stay as an academic or artistic guest or visiting professor at ETH Zurich, the University of Zurich, or the Zurich University of the Arts. The fellowship contributes to the costs of living with CHF 1,000 per month. Applications can be submitted any time during the year, a minimum of three and a maximum of twelve months before the start of the planned fellowship. Applications are reviewed twice a year, and dates of review are available on the Collegium's website.

NOMIS Senior Fellowships

With the support of the NOMIS Foundation, the Collegium Helveticum offers NOMIS Senior Fellowships to distinguished researchers whose work resonates beyond their own fields. Beginning in September 2026, four NOMIS Senior Fellowships will be awarded per academic year.

Candidates must be nominated by faculty members or research units at ETH Zurich, the University of Zurich, or the Zurich University of the Arts; self-nominations are possible if supported by at least two faculty members from these institutions.

NOMIS Senior Fellows will work on site at the Collegium and pursue innovative, interdisciplinary research in collaboration with local faculty. Their presence is expected to enrich the Collegium and leave a lasting impact on Zurich's academic community.

Sabbatical-at-home fellowships

The Collegium recognizes the importance of sabbaticals in academic life and is committed to supporting scholars who may not be able to relocate abroad during their leave. The sabbatical-at-home fellowship offers the opportunity to benefit from international and interdisciplinary exchange while remaining in Zurich/at the home institution. This format is open to faculty members of the Collegium's three supporting institutions. In addition, professors at ETH Zurich can apply for an additional sabbatical with the specific aim of spending it at the Collegium.

Associate fellows

Associate fellows are established researchers or artists affiliated with ETH Zurich, the University of Zurich, or Zurich University of the Arts, who apply together with early-career and senior fellows. Usually, associate fellows are tenured or tenure-track faculty. If this is not the case, two associate fellows may jointly support an early-career or senior fellow with a co-signed letter of recommendation, with at least one co-signee being a professor. At the Zurich University of the Arts, the letter may be also co-signed by a department chair. Associate fellows may also agree to integrate fellows into their group part-time and provide infrastructure for their research.



Information on detailed selection criteria and application forms:
collegium.ethz.ch/fellowship-program

“During my internship at the Collegium, I was able to experience academic life even before beginning my university studies. A personal highlight was when Senior Fellow Moran Bercovici introduced to the Events Office his vision for *Interfacial Aesthetics*, an exhibition exploring the artistic and scientific potential of liquid interfaces. After months of collaborative planning, we unveiled an installation where science and art converged in extraordinary ways. I enjoyed supporting the project in my role at the Events Office, and the collaboration was both productive and rewarding. Its selection for the Venice Architecture Biennale was a testament to its quality and impact. This experience taught me that science is not confined to strict boundaries but can be expressed creatively and shared with a wider audience. The Collegium is a truly remarkable place that not only fosters exchange among fellows across disciplines but also actively engages with the public. I remain deeply grateful for the opportunities I had there.”

Interfacial Aesthetics
From Earth to Space
Exhibition, March 25 – April 15, 2025
→ Details on page 50



Valentina Azzato
Support Events Office 2024–2025



Spotlight Bridging Disciplines, Engaging the Public

The Conclusion and Future of the Doctoral Program “Epistemologies of Aesthetic Practices”

The year 2024 marked the eighth and final year of funding for the doctoral program “Epistemologies of Aesthetic Practices” by swissuniversities. Twice in 2024, the program was evaluated as being “excellent”: first in an evaluation by swissuniversities, and second by external reviewers as part of an evaluation of the research coming out of the doctoral programs commissioned by the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). The reviewers highlighted the following points as particularly positive: First, they emphasized the excellent supervision—in particular for a doctoral program in the arts—of the participating graduate students. This is closely linked to the high regard held for the involved faculty members from the three partner institutions, the ZHdK, the University of Zurich (UZH), and ETH Zurich. The program successfully connects arts-related practices within the program, different research institutes, and the learning of artistic approaches with perspectives on art theory, art history, and art education. In total, nine doctoral projects have been completed, and seven other projects are close to completion, marking it out as a notable success compared to similar programs.

Another major accomplishment were the two doctoral colloquia and the annual conference in 2024. As typical for the program, these events were developed in collaboration with the doctoral candidates in a bottom-up process. About twenty doctoral candidates not only took the opportunity to present their work for discussion and exchange feedback during the two days of colloquia, but they also actively participated in discussions on the future direction of the doctoral program. All members of the program are committed to continuing the essential network that provides an ideal working environment for them and enables arts-related doctorates through inter-university collaboration.

The three-day annual conference in 2024 was seen as a key event by both the doctoral candidates and the program leadership. Under the title “Repair, Prepare: The Transformative Potential of the Arts and the Operability of Their Temporality,” the conference focused on the role of the arts today in addressing crises.

The program was developed by a working group of doctoral candidates, a call for contributions was launched, and a selection process for contributors was initiated. Both the scholarly and the arts-related contributions were of the highest quality. The program can be viewed via www.tagungeap.ch. An accompanying publication is in the works.

Over the past years, both UZH and ETH Zurich have adjusted their doctoral regulations to provide a formal framework for doctoral candidates in the program to be awarded their degrees. A temporary funding agreement for the program has been secured, albeit at a reduced level. Sylvia Sasse, a member of the program leadership, secured funding from the Graduate School of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at UZH for four years, enabling a research retreat in 2025. The ZHdK Research Focus on Aesthetics was able to contribute additional funding for 2025. ETH faculty members involved in the program have indicated their willingness to also contribute financially.

The program leadership and coordinators, together with partners from the three supporting universities, have worked successfully to institutionalize the doctoral program with a new conceptual and organizational direction. Due to structural changes in the PhD program at ZHdK, this process is not yet fully complete. In 2025, the governing board of the Collegium Helveticum renewed its offer to support the joint doctoral program of the three universities. Negotiations are still ongoing at this stage. We are optimistic that with the successful conclusion of these negotiations, the doctoral program will continue to serve as a leading platform for graduate education and collaboration in the fields of aesthetic theory and philosophy of the arts, an initiative that is unique both in Switzerland and in the surrounding regions.

Judith Siegmund
Head of the PhD program
“Epistemologies of Aesthetic Practices”

Welcoming New Members to the Advisory Board and Selection Committee

The advisory board plays an important role in supporting the Collegium's strategic development. Its members advise the director in positioning the Collegium as an institute for advanced study within the academic landscape. Reflecting the interdisciplinary outlook of the Collegium, the composition of the advisory board represents the broad spectrum of fields and approaches present at the institute.

The current advisory board brings together scholars, artists, and professionals of exceptional distinction. The Collegium is pleased to welcome five new members: Ignacio Cirac, Regula Rapp, Laure Saint-Raymond, Hito Steyerl, and Walter Thurnherr. Monika Bütler, Lorraine Daston, and Sir Charles Godfray continue to serve as board members.

Equally vital is the selection committee for the early-career fellowship program, which assesses publications and assists the director in selecting fellows who are the best fit for the Collegium. Four new members have joined the committee: Marcelle Soares-Santos, Isabel Mundry, Michael Hagner, and Yves Barral. Kerstin

Vokinger and Marcel Bleuler will continue their service on the committee. We welcome the members of the selection committee also as fellows of the Collegium for the tenure of their service.

Through their diverse backgrounds, extensive experience, and forward-looking vision, the members of the advisory board and selection committee help to sustain the Collegium as a vibrant space for dialogue across disciplines and as an inspiring destination for future fellows.

We would like to thank Annette Oxenius, Sylvia Sasse, and Nicolas Spencer, who have completed their service as members of the selection committee, for their contributions over the past two years. In her role as vice president for research at ETH Zurich, Annette Oxenius now serves on the governing board of the Collegium as the representative of ETH Zurich. We also extend our gratitude to Antje Boetius, Martino Stierli, and Jörg Widmann, whose period of service has concluded as members of the advisory board.

Organization

Staff

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Director

Mario Wimmer

Deputy Director

Andrea Truttmann

Administrations and Events

Mick Lehmann

Communications

Supporting staff

Eliot Gisel

Communications

Leila Freutel

Administrations

Valentina Azzato

Events

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Zurich University of the Arts

Elisabeth Stark

Vice President Research,
University of Zurich

Christian Wolfrum

Vice President for Research,
ETH Zurich (until July 31, 2025)

Annette Oxenius

Vice President for Research,
ETH Zurich (since August 1, 2025)

Martine Vernooj

Secretary of the Governing Board,
ETH Zurich

Advisory board

Monika Büttler

Honorary Professor of Economic
Policy at the University of St. Gallen, CH

Lorraine Daston

Director Emerita of the Max Planck
Institute for the History of Science,
Berlin and Permanent Visiting
Professor of Social Thought and
History at the University of Chicago, US

Sir Charles Godfray

Director of the Oxford Martin School
and Professor of Population Biology
at the University of Oxford, UK

Since January 1, 2025

J. Ignacio Cirac

Director of the Max Planck Institute
of Quantum Optics, Garching, DE

Regula Rapp

Rector of the Barenboim-Said
Academy, Berlin, DE

Hito Steyerl

Professor of Emergent Digital Media,
Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, DE

Laure Saint-Raymond

Professor of Mathematics, Institut
des Hautes Études Scientifiques,
Université Paris-Saclay, FR

Walter Thurnherr

Former Federal Chancellor
of Switzerland and Professor of
Practice, ETH Zurich, CH

Until December 31, 2024

Antje Boetius

Director of the Alfred-Wegener-
Institute, Bremerhaven,
Professor of Geomicrobiology
at the University of Bremen, DE

Martino Stierli

Chief Curator of Architecture and
Design at the Museum of Modern
Art, New York, US

Jörg Widmann

Professor of Composition at the
Barenboim-Said Academy, Berlin, DE

Selection committee for early-career fellowships

Marcel Bleuler

Head of the Institute for
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Zurich University of the Arts, CH

Kerstin Noëlle

Vokinger

Professor of Law and Medicine,
University of Zurich, and Professor
of Regulation in Law, Medicine,
and Technology, ETH Zurich, CH

Since October 1, 2025

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Professor of Cellular Biochemistry,
ETH Zurich, CH

Michael Hagner

Professor Emeritus of Science
Studies, ETH Zurich, CH

Isabel Mundry

Professor in the Department of Music,
Zurich University of the Arts, CH

Marcelle Soares-Santos

Professor of Astrophysics,
University of Zurich, CH

Until September 30, 2025

Annette Oxenius

Professor in the Department of
Biology, ETH Zurich, CH

Sylvia Sasse

Professor of Slavic Literature,
University of Zurich, CH

Nicolas Spencer

Professor Emeritus in the Depart-
ment of Materials, ETH Zurich, CH

PhD program

“Epistemologies of
Aesthetic Practices”

Judith Siegmund

Head of Program, Zurich University
of the Arts, CH

Dominique Raemy

Coordinator (until April 30, 2025)

Benno Wirz

Coordinator (until December 31, 2024)

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