

Creative Ecologies

This is the fifth webinar in the series of Climate Talks hosted by SGI-UK and The Centre For Applied Buddhism, entitled “Creative Ecologies.”

In this instalment, we hear from members of SGI-UK and how they have incorporated ecological thinking into their work. A strong theme running throughout is the Buddhist concept of ‘*esho funi*’, which is the teaching of the oneness of self and environment.

Dr. Koichi Samuels is the SGI-UK Youth division leader, and he also works in the field of renewable energy policy.

Within SGI-UK, he studies and engages in climate issues, the Buddhist perspective on life, nature and human beings, and how we can create a future based on the dignity of life.

Koichi is emcee for this event, and fields questions from the viewers at the end.

Dr. Arianna Sdei is an architect and sustainability consultant. Her talk is entitled: ‘*Towards Carbon Zero Architecture.*’

Arianna outlines her work in renewable energy within architecture, and in these instances she shares how a retrofitting project she worked on, creating more energy efficiency, helped to raise awareness amongst residents and their children of their homes’ energy consumption. Arianna is currently involved in finding ways to achieve Net Zero carbon emission in new builds.

Dr. Emilia Terracciano is a lecturer in the History of Art at the University of Manchester, having trained in South Asian history and specialising in the rich visual cultures of India.

Due to copyright reasons, we cannot include the recording of the talk Emilia gave as part of the Creative Ecologies Webinar, but we can offer the following synopsis:

In her talk entitled, ‘*In the company of trees, making sense of learning and living in an ecologically damaged world*’, Emilia shares how she developed her University course over the period of global upheaval relating to COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustices coming into sharper focus and a discontent amongst the students with Eurocentrism that was becoming more and more evident in various institutions of education.

Welcoming the students’ discontent, Emilia’s course focused on the environment, and artistic responses to the environment, particularly from South Asia, and explores the deep interconnectedness of life between those living in the West, such as Europe, and those in the Global South, such as India and Pakistan. Emilia shares the work and philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore and how it has impacted her approach to education. The course was met with great enthusiasm, and the students produced remarkable projects as a result. Emilia ends by sharing her hopes that the students will feel empowered to take action based on their learning and imagination.

Dr Louise Squire’s talk is entitled: ‘*Fiction, ecology and the Buddhist view of death.*’ Louise opens her talk by exploring the themes of climate that appear in novels, collectively termed ‘Climate Fiction.’ Addressing how the complex issues of the climate crisis are sometimes

distilled into more simplistic, fatalist narratives. This, it can be argued, is not helpful, because it doesn't address the questions of how we can respond and take action for the sake of the planet.

Louise shares that because human beings deny death, or in other words do not accept that they are mortal, they struggle to understand who they are in the world, which leads to us take actions which undermine the environment. By being able to face death, we are able to recognise our participation in the natural world, and think deeply about how we use our lives for the benefit of others and our environment.