

SENSEmaking



A Symposium on Contemplative Technologies

Contemplative Sciences Center
Contemplative Commons
University of Virginia

October 9-10, 2025

The symposium is an incubator of ideas and experiences designed to catalyze cutting-edge research on how contemplative practices and immersive technologies can revitalize the human capacity for sensemaking. The event features public talks, art exhibits, and receptions. The symposium is free for the UVA community: students, faculty, and staff; and open to the public.

[Learn more](#) | [Register](#)

Thursday, October 9

8:00am-9:00am Refreshments and exhibitions in the Contemplative Commons

9:00am-10:00am **Welcome**
Kelly Crace, Executive Director, Contemplative Sciences Center
Lori McMahan, Vice President for Research, UVA

Opening Remarks
Contemplative Technologies of Human Sensemaking
Michael Sheehy, Director of Research, Contemplative Sciences Center

Guided Meditation
Pir Zia Inayat Khan

10:00am-12:15pm **Session I — Sensemaking**
Wolfgang Buttress – Eco-Artist – United Kingdom
Jelena Markovic – Philosophy – Université Grenoble Alpes, France
James Gentry – Buddhist Studies – Stanford University
David Glowacki – Techno-Artist – Intangible Realities Laboratory, Spain
Moderator: Devin Zuckerman – Buddhist Studies – UVA

12:15pm-2:00pm **Lunch**
Concurrent practices, experiences, and exhibitions

- 12:15-12:45pm: Opening for the Tara Pachamama, Suite 4A
- 1:15-2:00pm: Interrupting the Ordinary, Courtyard
- 1:30-2:00pm: Premiere of Morven Resounding with Matthew Burtner, 4th Floor, The Conservatory
- All day: Ninfeo, 1st floor Gallery

2:00pm-4:15pm **Session II — Hearing: Sound & Silence**
JoVia Armstrong – Musician – UVA
Patrick Finan – Clinical Pain Psychologist – UVA
Kythe Heller – Interdisciplinary Artist – Harvard University
Adam Lobel – Buddhist Studies, Contemplative – 4F Regeneration
Moderator: Matthew Burtner – Sound Artist – UVA

4:15pm-4:35pm **Guided Meditation**
Adam Lobel

5:00pm-7:00pm **Reception | Preview Event [this reception/preview event is full]**
NINFEO (EXPLORATIONS, STUDIES AND RESPONSES)

Wolfgang Buttress — Solo exhibition at Les Yeux du Monde located at 841 Wolf Trap Rd, Charlottesville, VA 22911

Friday, October 10

9:00am-9:30am Refreshments and exhibitions in the Contemplative Commons

9:30am-10:00am **Guided Meditation**
Andrew Holecek

10:00am-12:15pm **Session III — *Seeing: Light & Darkness***
Kelsey Johnson – Astronomer – UVA
Andrew Holecek – Contemplative – Edge of Mind
Jesse Fleming – Media Artist – University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Greg Schmidt Goering – Jewish Studies – UVA
Moderator: Michael Sheehy – Contemplative Sciences – UVA

12:15pm-2:00pm **Lunch**
Concurrent practices, experiences, and exhibitions

- 1:15-2pm: Interrupting the Ordinary, Courtyard
- All day: Tara Pachamama, Suite 4A
- All day: Morven Resounding, 4th Floor, The Conservatory
- All day: Ninfeo, 1st floor Gallery

2:00pm-4:15pm **Session IV — *Extrasensory***
Mikey Siegel – Experience Designer – Synchrony Labs, University of California-Santa Barbara
Eve Ekman – Contemplative Social Scientist – Greater Good Science Center, University of California-Berkeley
Michael Lifshitz – Neuroscientist – McGill University
Oludamini Ogunnaike – Associate Professor of Africana Studies – UVA
Moderator: Casey Forgues – Editor – Journal of Contemplative Studies

4:15pm-4:40pm **Closing Remarks**
Sense and Making with the Environment
Matthew Burtner, Sound Artist, UVA

4:40pm-5:00pm **Soundbath**
Karianne Michelle

5:00pm-6:00pm **Reception**
Exhibitions and hors d'oeuvres in the Contemplative Commons

CONTEMPLATIVE COMMONS

With its state-of-the-art biophilic architecture and its mission to advance transdisciplinary approaches to human flourishing, UVA's new Contemplative Commons offers a singular venue for this gathering. The building thematizes the integration of art, nature, and technology through biophilic design intended to evoke awe and support exchange. Designed to engage students, faculty, and the broader public, the symposium invites audiences to participate directly in sensory-based, techno-art experiences. This structure encourages cross-disciplinary exchange while providing ample time for reflection, dialogue, and engagement with the exhibitions. Envisioned as a forum for sharing tools, knowledge, and practices across disciplines and communities, the symposium seeks to foster more informed, creative, and collaborative responses to complex human challenges through embodied sensemaking and collective reflection.

EXHIBITIONS

NINFEO (EXPLORATIONS, STUDIES AND RESPONSES)

by Wolfgang Buttress

Preview Event for Symposium Attendees: October 9, 5-7pm

| Artist remarks 6:15pm

Exhibition Dates: October 10-November 16, 2025

Location: Les Yeux du Monde Gallery.

Internationally recognized multidisciplinary artist Wolfgang Buttress presents a solo exhibition of new work at Les Yeux du Monde Gallery. Known for immersive, data-driven public artworks that use light and sound to give form to the rhythms of the natural world, Buttress will exhibit a body of work that both informed and responded to his major installation, NINFEO, at the heart of UVA's Contemplative Science Center.



Tara Pachamama: the aesthetics of infinite potential

by David Glowacki

Exhibition Dates: October 8-12, 2025

Location: Contemplative Commons, Studio 4A, 4th Floor

Tara Pachamama is a Green Tara manifestation that was visualized and elaborated by David Glowacki over an 18-month period in the 'ceja de selva' mountainous jungle region of the Upper Amazon in Northern Perú. During this time, Glowacki spent more than one thousand hours visualizing and painting this particular Green Tara, mostly by himself, in a jungle-hut-multimedia-art-studio, often communing with the

native plants ayahuasca and chakruna. Tara Pachamama is constructed as a mosaic from thousands of painstakingly hand-painted laser cut pieces of aluminum, which are magnetically affixed on glass. Rear projected backlights will shine through the joints of the individual mosaic pieces, enabling her to glow with the subtle light of the moon, honoring the celestial origin of her Sanskrit name, 'star'.

Morven Resounding

by Matthew Burtner

Location: Contemplative Commons, The Conservatory, 4th Floor

Morven Resounding is a program of surround-sound music based on field recordings and sonifications of [Morven Sustainability Lab](#). Hosted in [The Conservatory](#), an immersive light & sound room on the fourth floor of the Contemplative Commons, the 3-part program, created by [Matthew Burtner](#) (UVA Music Department, CSC Faculty Research Council) consists of "Night wind with voices," "Predawn rainstorm with binaural beats," and "Dawn bird chorus with weather sonification".



Virtual Reality Lucid Dreaming

by aNUma and CIRCL, facilitated by Lama Karma (Justin Wall)

Location: Contemplative Commons, CIRCL Research Lab, 2nd Floor

Experience a Virtual Reality meditation designed to simulate lucid dreaming. VR technologies are used to induce embodied and experiential openings of lucidity within one's waking life to support the transformation of ordinary habits of perception and cognition. The VR experience is designed to cultivate contemplative life skills by performing specific contemplative tasks while lucid in a dream-like, interactive, immersive virtual environment.

Interrupting the Ordinary: Site-Specific Spatial Audio

by Jesse Fleming and Eve Ekman

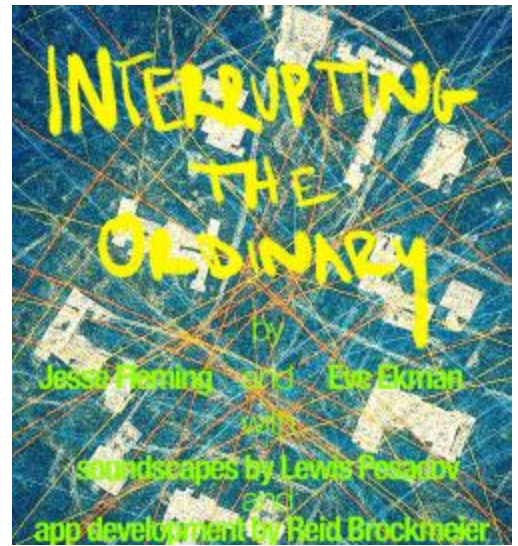
music and sound design by Lewis Pesacov

application development by Reid Brockmeier

Location: Contemplative Commons, Courtyard

Contemplative duo; artist Jesse Fleming and social scientist Eve Ekman invite participants into a collective, embodied exploration of UVA's campus landscape. This 30-minute spatial audio journey

re-orient us outside habitual movement, attention, and emotional patterns. Beginning with a shared sensory calibration, the group then disperses—guided by a digital application with cues and prompts—navigating the campus by their own desires and pausing at curated points of reflection. The experience concludes with a collective integration, reflecting on how shifts in perception can transform the ordinary and interrupt the habituated, dreamlike ways we move through the world.



PARTICIPANTS



JoVia Armstrong

Assistant Professor of Music, UVA

JoVia Armstrong is a Detroit-born percussionist, composer, sound artist, and educator. Her genre-blending work fuses experimental music, Black musical traditions, and immersive technology, creating transformative sonic experiences. She is an Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Virginia and the founder of Eunoia Society, an ensemble exploring sound healing, repetition, and multichannel composition.

Matthew Burtner

Professor of Music, UVA

Matthew Burtner is an Alaskan-born composer, sound artist and ecoacoustician whose research explores embodiment, ecology, polytemporality and noise. He is a member of the Faculty Research Council for the Contemplative Sciences Center and is Eleanor Shea Professor of Music at the University of Virginia, where he co-directs the Coastal Future Conservatory. His original compositions have been featured in the Conservatory at the Contemplative Commons.





Wolfgang Buttress

Eco-Artist, United Kingdom

Wolfgang Buttress is a UK-based artist with over 40 years of experience creating multi-sensory artworks that draw inspiration from our ever-evolving relationship with the natural world. Exploring themes of the natural and sublime, his artworks seek expression through structure, sound and light. Increasingly drawing inspiration from the vibrational ecology of the natural world and the ever-changing astronomical activity in space he collaborates with scientists and musicians to explore and interpret scientific discoveries through site specific sculptural installations, such as CSC's NINFEO.

Eve Ekman

Senior Fellow, Greater Good Science Center, University of California-Berkeley

Eve Ekman, PhD, MSW, is a contemplative social scientist creating and evaluating tools for emotional awareness in healthcare, wellbeing, and technology. With roots in clinical social work, integrative medicine, and contemplative science, she is lead teacher for Cultivating Emotional Balance, former wellbeing lead at Apple Health, Senior Fellow at UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center, and Fellow at the Mind & Life Institute.





Patrick Finan

Professor of Anesthesiology, UVA

Patrick H. Finan, PhD, is a clinical pain psychologist and an expert in cognitive, behavioral, and affective mechanisms and treatments for chronic pain. He has an active NIH-funded research program, The Finan Lab, that utilizes laboratory and psychotherapeutic intervention methodologies to probe mechanisms related to chronic pain. Dr. Finan's research interests include the biobehavioral features of emotion regulation in individuals with chronic pain.

Jesse Fleming

Media Artist, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Jesse R. Fleming is an artist, designer, and researcher exploring the intersection of emerging technology, contemplative practice, and human flourishing. As founder and director of Awareness Lab, he integrates AI, XR, and embodied spatial interfaces with contemplative science to architect experiences that deepen presence and relational awareness. His work spans academia, industry, and cultural institutions, shaping media and technologies that cultivate mindful interaction and transformative meaning-making.



Casey Forgues

Managing Editor, Journal of Contemplative Studies

Casey Forgues is managing editor of the Journal of Contemplative Studies. She is an editor, translator, and researcher specializing in tantric contemplative traditions and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. She is also a Buddhist Studies PhD candidate at the University of Vienna and editorial director of the Buddhist translation initiative Khyentse Vision Project.



James Gentry

Assistant Professor, Stanford University

James Gentry is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Stanford University. He specializes in Tibetan Buddhism, with particular focus on materiality, ritual, and the senses in its Tantric traditions. He is the author of the books *Power Objects in Tibetan Buddhism: The Life, Writings, and Legacy of Sokdokpa Lodrö Gyeltsen* (Brill, 2017) and *The Bodhisattva's Body in a Pill* (forthcoming from University of Virginia Press), along with numerous articles.



David Glowacki

Techno-Artist, Intangible Realities Laboratory

David Glowacki, PhD, MA is a cross-disciplinary researcher, multimedia artist, and musician. He is the founder of the 'Intangible Realities Laboratory', a research group based in Santiago de Compostela (Northern Spain) working at the frontiers of scientific, aesthetic, computational, and technological practice. His immersive digital artworks have been experienced by more than 200,000 people on 3 continents. With support from the Tiny Blue Dot Foundation, he is developing VR models of his 2006 NDE, offering people the opportunity to contemplate the persistence of awareness beyond the physical body.

Greg Schmidt Goering

Associate Professor of Religious Studies, UVA

Greg Goering researches ancient Israel and Early Judaism, combining historical, literary, and philological approaches with methods from cultural anthropology and cognitive linguistics. His interest is in how Jewish sages inculcated wisdom bodily in students by educating the senses and thereby constructing a sensorium. His current monograph *Wisdom in the Flesh* describes such a moment in the cultural history of the senses by taking the book of Proverbs as a case study.





Kythe Letitia Heller

Interdisciplinary Artist, Harvard University

Kythe Heller is an award-winning poet, essayist, philosopher of religious thought (philosophy and theology), and interdisciplinary artist. She earned a ThD at Harvard University in Comparative Studies in Religion, with a PhD Secondary Field in Arts, Film, and Visual Studies / Critical Media Practice. She is author of *Firebird*, a collection of poems nominated for the Massachusetts Book Award; *The Soul Conveys Itself in Shadow*, an edited collection of poetic translations, essays, and visual art, which received an Independent Publisher Book Award; and several critical studies on mysticism, indigenous thought, poetics, and socially-engaged arts.

Andrew Holecek

Resident Contemplative Scholar, Institute for Advanced Consciousness Studies

Andrew Holecek is an interdisciplinary scholar-practitioner in Tibetan Buddhism and other nondual wisdom traditions. His work involves studies on dream yoga and the practice of dark retreat. He is the Resident Contemplative Scholar at the Institute for Advanced Consciousness Studies, and a research consultant for the Cognitive Neuroscience Program at Northwestern University. Dr. Holecek is also a member of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, the author of nine books, and a concert pianist. His work integrates ancient wisdom traditions with contemporary perspectives, aiming to help individuals navigate spiritual challenges and end-of-life experiences.





Kelsey Johnson

Professor of Astronomy, UVA

Kelsey Johnson is a Professor of Astronomy at UVA, affiliate faculty in Religious Studies, and Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education. She is past president of both the American Astronomical Society and the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. She has won numerous awards, and her new book *Into the Unknown: the Quest to Understand the Mysteries of the Cosmos* was named one of the top 20 non-fiction books of 2024 by Publisher's Weekly.

Lama Karma (Justin Wall)

Lead Designer and Facilitator, aNUma

Lama Karma (Justin Wall) is a teacher in the Karma Kagyu and Shangpa Kagyu lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. He is the spiritual director of the Milarepa Retreat Center in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. He also serves as lead designer and facilitator for aNUma, a company specializing in offering virtual reality experiences for persons and their families facing a terminal diagnosis.



Pir Zia Inayat Khan

Sufi Teacher, Sulūk Academy

Pir Zia Inayat Khan, PhD, president of the Inayatiyya and founder of Sulūk Academy, is a scholar of religion and teacher of Sufism in the lineage of his grandfather, Hazrat Inayat Khan. He is author of *Immortality: A Traveler's Guide*; *Dream Flowers: The Collected Works of Noor Inayat Khan*; and *Mingled Waters: Sufism and the Mystical Unity of Religions*. Pir Zia divides his time between Richmond, Virginia and Suresnes, France.



Michael Lifshitz

Assistant Professor, McGill University

Michael Lifshitz works in the Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry at McGill University in Montreal. He also co-directs the Psychedelics and Contemplation Lab, an interdisciplinary research space that combines phenomenology, neuroscience and ethnography to shed light on the plasticity of consciousness.



Adam Lobel

Independent Scholar and Contemplative, 4F Regeneration

Adam Lobel, PhD, practices at the threshold of ecologies, Buddhist-inspired meditation and philosophy, contemplative education, and psycho-social political change. Adam is a scholar-practitioner of philosophy and religion, focusing on Dzogchen Tibetan Buddhism and contemporary theory. A professor of Ecopsychology and a Focusing professional, he is curious about cultural therapeutics. He teaches in the Ecosattva Training, is a Guiding Teacher for One Earth Sangha, a GreenFaith fellow, and is active in ecological justice movements.

Jelena Markovic

Philosopher, Université Grenoble Alpes

Jelena Markovic is a philosopher specializing in empirically-informed philosophy of mind. Her work runs along two parallel and intersecting tracks, the first on unchosen transformative experiences, particularly transformative grief, and the second on the philosophical psychology of attention. She is a postdoctoral fellow at the Maison de la Création et de l'Innovation, at the Université Grenoble Alpes, and will be joining UVA's Contemplative Sciences Centre as a postdoctoral fellow in January 2026.





Karianne Michelle

Musician & Founder, Lofti

Karianne Michelle has spent two decades supporting C-level leaders as a communications strategist for companies including State Farm, GE, and Abbott, and as a well-being expert for fast-growing startups and Fortune organizations. A sound bath artist with certifications in yoga, meditation, Qigong, and Reiki, she founded Lofti to connect corporate teams to a well-being. She received her B.A., Music from Luther college and leads sound experiences at UVA's CSC.

Oludamini Ogunnaike

Associate Professor of Africana Studies, UVA

Oludamini Ogunnaike is Associate Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Virginia. His research examines the philosophical and artistic dimensions of postcolonial, colonial, and pre-colonial Islamic and indigenous religious traditions of West and North Africa. Author of the award-winning book *Deep Knowledge: Ways of Knowing in Sufism and Ifa, Two West African Intellectual Traditions* (Penn State University Press, 2020) and *Poetry in Praise of Prophetic Perfection: West African Madīḥ Poetry and its Precedents* (Islamic Texts Society, 2020), he is currently working on a project on Sufi poetry and poetic knowledge and on manuscripts on Yoruba mythology, Islamic philosophy in pre-colonial West Africa, and Afro-Caribbean and African Islamic decolonial thought and praxis.





Michael Sheehy

Director of Research, Contemplative Sciences Center, UVA

Michael R. Sheehy, Ph.D., is a Research Associate Professor and the Director of Research at the Contemplative Sciences Center at the University of Virginia, as well as Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Contemplative Studies. He is a meditation researcher and founding director of the CIRCL Contemplative Innovation + Research Co-Lab, a transdisciplinary experimental hub that studies contemplation in bodies and minds, cultures and ecologies, and intersubjectively.

Mikey Siegel

Experience Designer, Synchrony Labs, University of California-Santa Barbara

Mikey Siegel is an experienced designer at the intersection of technology, wisdom, and human connection. He creates tools and experiences that support collective awakening through immersive media, contemplative practice, and transformative design. Founder of Synchrony Labs, he also founded Consciousness Hacking, Awakened Futures Summit, and the Transformative Technology Conference. He did graduate work at the MIT Media Lab and has taught at Stanford.



Devin Zuckerman

Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, UVA

Devin Zuckerman is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia. Her research explores the ways that Tibetan Buddhist theories of the “primary elements” of earth, water, fire, wind and space have historically functioned within forms of discourse on the human body, the natural environment, and as a theme within meditation practice.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Michael Sheehy: Professor and Director of Research, Contemplative Sciences Center – Chair

Matthew Burtner: Professor, UVA Music Department

Greg Schmidt Goering: Professor, UVA Religious Studies Department

JoVia Armstrong: Professor, UVA Music Department

Devin Zuckerman: Assistant Professor, UVA Religious Studies Department

Adam Liddle: Research Manager, Contemplative Sciences Center

Diane Naughton: Advisory Board Member, Contemplative Sciences Center

The symposium is generously sponsored by the Hemera Foundation, Diane and Tim Naughton, and the UVA Page-Barbour Workshops with support from multiple departments and institutes at UVA.



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