

"Eastern Grey Squirrel" (116-119)
by Carollyne Yardley

becoming-Feral
a book of beasts

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EASTERN GREY SQUIRREL

Sciurus carolinensis

“We Squirrels have co-evolved on planet Earth for more than 160 million years. Remnants of Earth’s oldest dirt is squirrel. We are secretive, unpredictable, agile, territorial, resourceful; we love to eat, talk to trees, and flick our bushy tails to announce. Eyes of brown see your blue and yellow. Kuk-kuk-quaas! We chase, forage, and hide our favorite nuts from others because we are devious. Squirrel laughter contains more bitter than sugary sweet.

We can teach you how to survive this place.”

Let me tell you a squirrel story.

Squirrels have ancient histories of becoming-with humans, leaving deep scratches in political and ecological history. Called “rats with furry tails,” the Eastern grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) is endemic to eastern and central North America. As a nut-eating species, the grey squirrel is also an essential natural forest regenerator. After their historic range was destroyed in the 19th century due to settler colonialism, grey squirrels were captured by colonists and intentionally introduced to city parks and kept as pets. At this point, people stopped shooting squirrels and began feeding them. In the early 20th century, grey squirrels broke free of park confinement and were able to flourish in the heart of the city, becoming further connected to humans and their constructed landscapes.

In my art practice, I spend time observing and researching grey squirrels whose territory surrounds my home. After I saved a dying squirrel in my yard, the intimacy of the encounter evoked a desire to create artwork to document my alliance with the squirrel—thus, *Squirrealism* was born. Squirrealism narrates origin stories of transformation and coevolution; it describes a process of art-making that channels conceptual and material connections between species to think and make, in Donna Haraway's words, sympoetically.

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, recycling bins filled with blue nitrile gloves, indexing fears about contagion while also shifting the landscape for urban foragers. As part of my practice, I foraged through bins on my street in squirrealist communion, feeling keenly aware of my own ferality. I was often interrupted by a curious squirrel, a welcome companion during times of isolation. Eastern grey squirrels forage in urban areas and are familiar with human waste. A grey squirrel was photographed last year in the UK carrying a blue plastic bag to build a nest. Squirrels and humans are mutually constituted by these discarded materials.

Squirrealism chews at the frameworks of normative epistemologies and scratches at the suffocating edifice of Western art history, looking

for a way out. It resists domestication and taxonomy, affirming ferality and hybridity. Squirrealism paw-zes to ask: how might squirrels reorient our relationships to human waste, from toxic epistemologies to toxic landfills, from blue plastic bags to blue nitrile gloves?

Carollyne Yardley
Artist researcher
—Canada

p.116
Becoming-with (detail), Carollyne Yardley, 2021
Pigment on canvas, 78" x 60"

→
Contagion (detail), Carollyne Yardley, 2021
Gifted human hair, foraged used blue nitrile gloves,
resin, acrylic nails, armature
25" x 8" x 32" (each hand 10" x 3" x 4")

from the Sympoetics of Squirrealism series,
exhibited in *Becoming* (Final Thesis Exhibition),
Emily Carr University, 2021
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A catalogue of this book is available from the British Library.

