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# Squirrealism and Urban Ecologies: From Listening through Psychometry to Creative Activism

CAROLLYNE YARDLEY, MFA

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Carollyne Yardley, *A Pregnant Eastern Grey Squirrel (Sciurus carolinensis)*. 2021. Photograph by Carollyne Yardley.



Carollyne Yardley, *Sympoetics of Squirrealism* (installation view), 2021. Mixed media, 18' x 8' x 2'.  
Installation in *Becoming* (Final Thesis Exhibition), Emily Carr University, 2021. Photograph by Carollyne Yardley.



Carollyne Yardley, *Western Bluebird: Locally Extinct*, oil on panel, 2025, 36" diameter.





René-Antoine Houasse. *Apollo et Daphne (partial)*, 1677. Oil on canvas.



# ECOOCENE

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# ECOOCENE

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## Holobionts: Making and Living through Squirrealism

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*Holobionts series*. Foraged materials: Squirrel hair, human hair, cat hair, and leaf skeleton, oak twigs, magnolia petals, cloth, seagull feather, wax. Twenty-four pieces. Various dimensions range from 15" x 8" x 2" to 2" X 2" x 2". Detail.



Ryan Senechal, *Kwetlal Food Ecosystem (Garry Oak Ecosystem)*, Winter, 2025. Photograph by Ryan Senechal.



Carollyne Yardley, *Urban Forest and 500-year-old Garry oak tree*. Summer, 2025. Photograph by Carollyne Yardley.

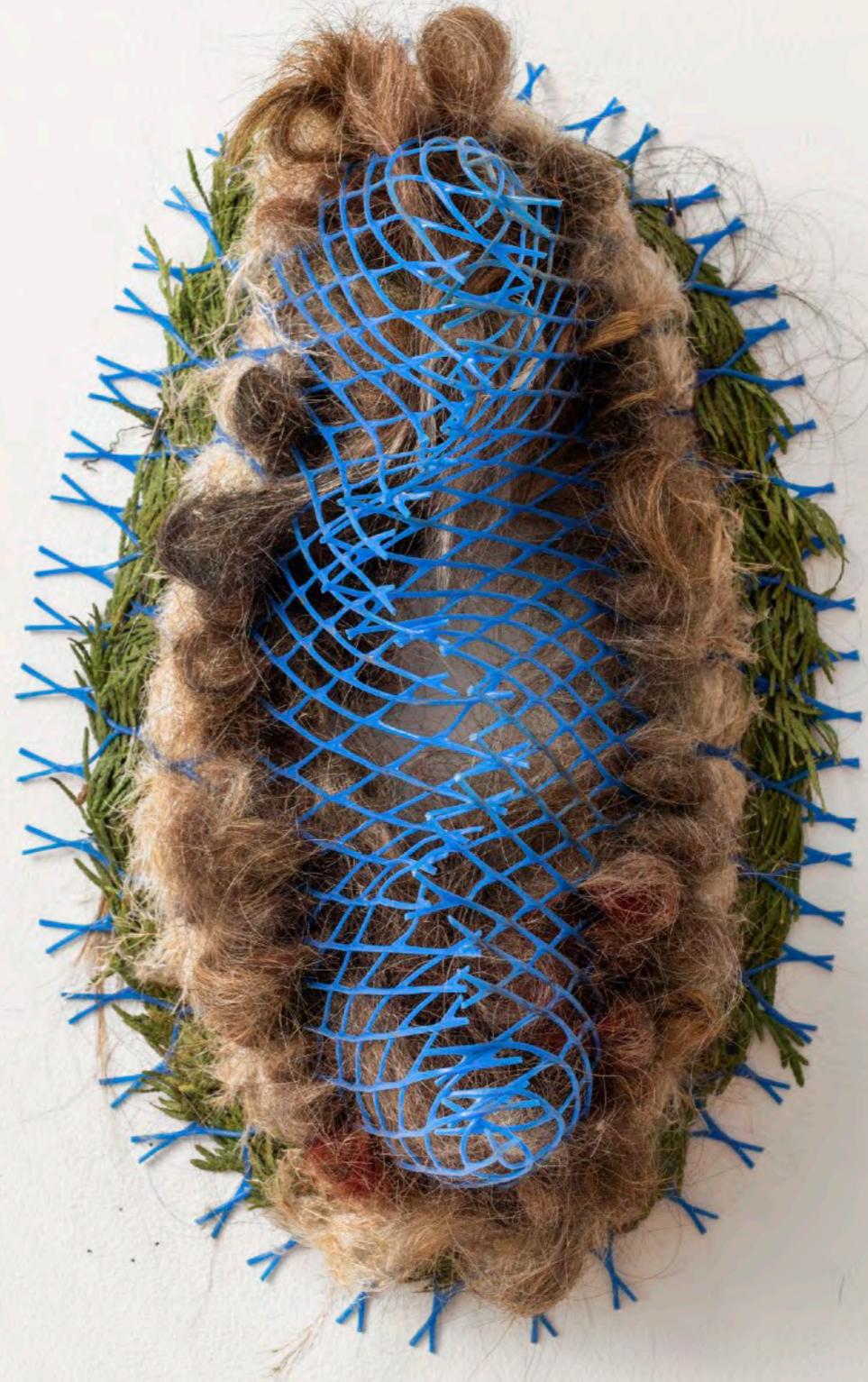


Squirrel pictured carrying plastic bags to build nest in Haringey. *Enfield Independent*, 25 Feb.2020.

# Becoming Plastic

Carollyne Yardley





Carollyne Yardley, *Molecular* from *Symbiogenesis series*, 2021. Foraged materials: cedar bough (sustainably harvested after windstorm), pampas grass, human hair, plastic mesh tree protector, 17'' x 10'' x 8'' (Front view). *Becoming Plastic*, Installation View at Deluge Contemporary Art 2022.



Carollyne Yardley, *Contagion* (detail), from the *Sympoetics of Squirrealism series*, 2021. Gifted human hair, foraged used blue nitrile gloves, resin, acrylic nails, armature, 25" x 32" x 8" (each hand 10" x 3" x 4"). *Becoming Plastic* (installation view), 2022.



Carollyne Yardley, *Rituals of Care* from *Sympoetics of Squirrealism* series, 2021. Garry oak seedling grown from foraged acorns, soil and oak barrel from garden, human hair, used blue nitrile gloves from caregiving duties, acrylic nails and armature. *Becoming Plastic*, Installation View at Deluge Contemporary Art, 2022.



Carollyne Yardley. Speckled oak galls (*Besbicus mirabilis*) at the Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society nursery ([www.garryoak.info](http://www.garryoak.info)), 2025. Photo by Carollyne Yardley.



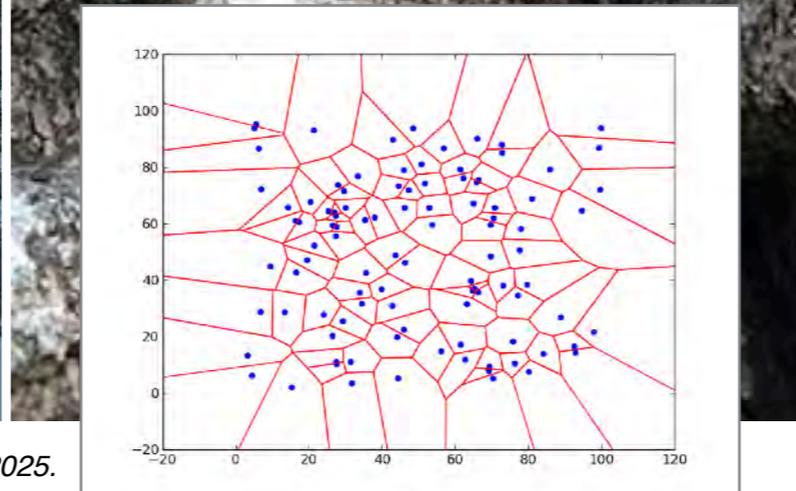
Carollyne Yardley. *Magnetic Sympathy*, 2025. Speckled oak galls (wasp vacated), and acrylic pink netting. Photograph by Carollyne Yardley



Carollyne Yardley. *Speckled gall wasp (Besbicus mirabilis)*, 2025. Photography by Carollyne Yardley



Ryan Senechal, Garry Oak Tree. Summer, 2025. Photograph.



Carollyne Yardley. Garry oak tree branch failure and sawdust, Summer 2025.



Carollyne Yardley. *Memory of a Thousand Seasons*, 2025. Installation view at the studio. Garry oak sawdust (sustainably sourced), and foraged orange plastic tree fencing.



Anonymouse, Carollyne with doe and fawn, 2018. Photograph.



Photo by Ryan Wilkes. *Squirrel for Mayor at City Hall, City of Victoria, June 12, 2025*  
[www.squirrelformayor.com](http://www.squirrelformayor.com)



Video by Ryan Wilkes | Youtube: [www.squirreiformayor.com](http://www.squirreiformayor.com)



[www.squirrelformayor.com](http://www.squirrelformayor.com)



Photo by Ryan Wilkes. *Squirrel for Mayor at City Hall, City of Victoria, June 12, 2025.*



Photo by Ryan Senechal. *Squirrel for Mayor on location at the Victoria International Airport. Bell 206B3 Jet Ranger, equipped with a Phase One IXM-100 camera.*



Mr. Floatie



Mr. Peanut

# Operation Inflation



A protester in a frog costume in front of federal officers Monday outside the immigration building in Portland, October 2025.



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# Squirrel For Mayor

*Squirrel for Mayor* is a research-creation project that combines arts-based methodologies and community engagement to examine the increasing concerns for urban forest and tree health, and the role of public participation in successful urban forest governance.



<p>City of Victoria Public tree inventory = 34,000. Private property = 115,000</p>	<p>Plantable space is a leading indicator of a sustainable urba rest, while overall tree cano surement is a lagging indica</p>	<p>s vs. the in My ards. ct of ch = Council ing for quadra le Plan , 2025.</p>
		<p>Sympoiesis and/or engineering</p>
<p>Confused by CoV urban forest governance?</p> <p>Funding by the province for mitigating heat island effects at Centennial square is \$713,510.</p> <p>17 deciduous saplings at \$10,000 per soil cell which might produce benefits in 30 years.</p> <p>OR keep the Sequoia tree and get more benefits today than in 2 decades from now. Head rTree report at Squirrelformayor.com.</p>	<p>CTV 25 06 12 squirrel 10 views · 4 days ago ...more</p> <p>SquirrelforMayor</p> <p>Subscribe</p>	<p>Garry Oak and associated ecosystems in this region, have a unique local, genetic adaption to the environment and its species community would be difficult and costly to read introduce if lost.</p>
<p>What are Garry oak ecosystems?</p> <p>The Kwetlal food system or Garry oak (<i>Quercus garryana</i>) ecosystem is a living artifact of the Indigenous peoples who took care of this land for generations.</p>	<p>f Victoria ral areas</p> <p>oak saplings om thirst and conditions. budget cut 025 cancelled position and fed natural areas.</p>	<p>planting on blic property</p> <p>ast of planting trees on ulevards is at st \$1,250 each. n areas with rdscaping, like linear Parks, e cost rises to 0,000 or more plus maintenance.</p>



Carollyne Yardley. *Caution, Expect Deer*, 2025, Photograph

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# Squirrealism and Urban Ecologies: From Listening through Psychometry to Creative Activism

CAROLLYNE YARDLEY, MFA



Carollyne Yardley  
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Dr. Magnolia Pauker  
Studies in Women and Gender 380: Art and Activism – Envisioning Social Justice,  
Vancouver Island University

Artist Talk  
26 February 2026

## **Squirrealism and Urban Ecologies: From Listening through Psychometry to Creative Activism**

### **Introduction: Positioning and Sensory Attunement**

Thank you Magnolia, and to you all, and with the multispecies communities that we share  
our thinking-with today.

My name is Carollyne, and I'm grateful to share my research-creation practice with you  
this afternoon.

But first, I want to take a moment for us all to take a deep breath, and think into the space  
and acknowledge something you might be sensing right now.

“Squirrealism and Urban Ecologies: From Listening through Psychometry to Creative  
Activism” begins by asking: How do we sense the environment? How does the  
environment sense us?

My artistic practice includes sensory co-emergence as a relational process – non-linear,  
embodied, and inseparable from the ecosystems in which it arises.

Today I'll be sharing how intuition and touch function in my art-making as listening

devices for interspecies communication in an urban environment and then share with you a new project - the emergence of a creative civic intervention at the municipal level.

### **Artist Position and Land Acknowledgement**

I am an interdisciplinary artist-researcher of Ukrainian Canadian settler and English-Scottish heritage based on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the lək'wəŋən speaking peoples known today as the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations, colonially referred to as Victoria BC, Canada. A generational cultivation of intuition informs my artistic process, but it wasn't until the last few years that I learned technologies of intuition could be used in academic art research.

My research-creation practice is informed by a years-long relationship with grey squirrels in the neighbourhood. As an artist with a practice that involves native and introduced land-based animals as a point of inquiry, it is important for me to be transparent about my relationship to this land.

### **Eastern Grey Squirrel**

My interest in non-domesticated animals stems from never having had a pet, and or controlled another animal's food or reproduction system. Squirrels maintain their own agency in this way, and therefore interest me in how they navigate colonial constructed habitats.

The Eastern grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) is endemic to eastern and central North America and is an essential natural forest regenerator. After their historic range was destroyed in the mid-nineteenth century due to settler colonialism and replaced by extensive logging and land clearing, grey squirrels became known as synanthropes,

species that carve out their existence within human-modified environments and are ecologically related to humans; they literally become with us.

I also want to acknowledge what I have learned from the grey squirrels. They have led me to noticing the wider ecosystem, shaped my artistic process, and guided me toward community work in urban forest conservation.

### **Squirrealism: Birth of a Method**

My research studies the ethology of grey squirrels and other urban beings and their links to human systems to speculate possible futures of hybrid emergence — shaped by toxicity, regeneration, and the interconnectedness of multispecies communities, through the vibrations connecting all beings and matter. For me, hybrid is both material (biological) and metaphysical. How an assemblage of the physical and the metaphysical results in something new (and that the material affective dimension is always in flux). In metaphysics, becoming-with challenges delusions of separation from other species in ecological communities.

Squirrealism emerged after an interspecies boundary was crossed — when I held an injured squirrel in my hands. The intimacy of the encounter touched me and evoked a desire to document my alliance with the squirrel through artwork — thus, Squirrealism was born.

What began with asking what grey squirrels can teach us about Western-centric ideas of taxonomy and supposed boundaries between species systems led to thinking about the matter of molecules we inhabit, inhabit us, move through and between us, and are made of us.

Squirrealism developed as a method of art-making that channels conceptual and material connections between species to think and make, sympoetically — as a practice of making-with, or becoming-together-apart.

Thought, like sympoiesis, relates a type of assemblage or metamorphoses, glimmering across zones of “doings” and “becomings”.<sup>1</sup>

Becomings are different than filiation<sup>2</sup>. They concern alliances, how we modify and are by modified by others.

### **Framing my Practice: Symbiosis and Sympoiesis**

Theorist and science writer Lynn Margulis defines symbiosis as the long-term physical association between different species — life emerging through relationship rather than autonomy. Building on this, Feminist Philosopher Donna Haraway proposes sympoiesis<sup>3</sup> — making-with — instead of autopoiesis, or self-making. That our lives are formed through entanglement with other species.

In the book *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway’s speculative Camille Stories imagine humans in symbiogenetic kinship with monarch butterflies – using technology to graft butterfly antennae, or other enhanced features to modify humans - as a becoming-with that enables humans to sense and see differently, cultivating empathy and multispecies

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<sup>1</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari ask us to use their collaborative book as it was conceived—as “an open system” for sparking an assemblage of new thoughts (15). Permeable boundaries between human and nonhuman systems are discussed in the chapter “Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible” as fractals that make up our bodies and the transferring of energy between us and all things in proximity. Thought, like sympoiesis, relates a type of assemblage or metamorphoses to zones of “doings” and “becomings.”

<sup>2</sup> Jane Bennett and Donna Haraway use this term to demonstrate a certain way of thinking about alliances or assemblages and “to mod(e)ify and be modified by others” (Bennett 22). “Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance” (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 41).

<sup>3</sup> “Sympoiesis is a simple word: it means ‘making-with.’” Nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 58).

care. It helps humans get a better sense of the world through this symbiotic alliance  
After ecological collapse, survival depends not on independence, but on collaborative  
hybridity and new kinship networks.

In my work, I draw on Haraway's multispecies sympoiesis to explore the blurred  
boundaries between species systems — using art to investigate how we become-with  
others in an artistic way.

### **Foraging, Walking, and Noticing**

Anthropologist Anna Tsing writes, “Living in a time of planetary catastrophe begins with  
a practice at once humble and difficult: noticing the worlds around us”

In this sense, Squirrealism is a research-creation methodology that operates through  
intuitive and embodied methods which begin by channeling squirrel behavior and nest  
making techniques — walking, foraging, and weaving together salvaged materials  
composting in the soil around trees inhabited by squirrels as a way to stimulate new  
thought.

Intuition, touch, and chance guide both the foraging process and the studio work through  
psychometry — a form of clairvoyance using touch — to receive impressions of each  
material's history. Psychometry helps me disrupt anthropomorphic assumptions and  
situate my human animality in a sympoetic relationship with squirrels and multispecies  
communities.

Walking produces movement of thought and is subject to constant revision, while  
remnants found by chance interrupt intentional aesthetics.

## Psychometry, Material Memory, and Cosmologies

Psychometry comes from the Greek words *psyche* and *metron* — “soul measure.” It suggests that matter holds memory, and that all materials exist in energetic alliance, assemblage, a relational entanglement, or co-presence.

Similar concepts appear across diverse cosmologies and speculative imaginaries: in *Star Wars*, it’s the Force Echo — the ability to sense an object’s history; in Octavia Butler’s *Patternist* series, memories live in matter; and in Japanese Shinto traditions, sacred objects are understood to house spirits, or *kami*.

Author Natalie Loveless writes that we are always already becoming-with all that we touch and that touches us.

Mohawk and Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts describes this non-distinctive space as Place-Thought, where place and thought are never separated; it is “based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts” (41).

For me, psychometry becomes an intuitive technology — not about extracting knowledge, but about cultivating receptivity. In her book *Vibrant Matter*, political theorist Jane Bennett argues that human bodies respond to the influence of matter through an “aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality” (8).

With the use of technologies such as Wi-Fi, which transmit signals between devices, wireless communication makes it conceptually easier to imagine how thought transference and molecular action might operate.

While all humans are capable of psychic powers, astral travel, and intuitive interspecies communication, there is a general agreement that practice can strengthen these cosmic

experiences.

Listening through touch makes it possible to awaken our psychic sensitivity and contributes to our ability to make ourselves receptive to the most subtle vibrations of the environment. All suggest: nothing is ever truly lost; everything is recorded, stored in an energetic archive of time.

Feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad says that “Touching is a matter of response-ability.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Holobionts and Symbiogenesis**

I began the series Holobionts: Making and Living through Squirrealism, viewed here in the Ecocene journal while walking, and located squirrels sitting high up in the tree branches. Using intuition, I collected organic and symbiotic remnants composting in the soil from around the tree’s base: magnolia petals, squirrel hair, dog hair, a dryer sheet, leaf skeletons, seagull feathers, tree branches, and acorns.

In the studio, I used psychometry to receive impressions about each of these species’ material history, and wove these remnants together with my own hair, curious how intuitive methods of touch could visualize hybrid relations. While holding the matter in my hands, I began to channel the DNA code of the material into creating assemblages. From a psychometric perspective, this technology of attunement collapses time through

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<sup>4</sup> In “On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am,” Barad discusses response-ability as an ethical practice grounded in entanglement — not responsibility as obligation after the fact, but accountability that emerges from relational intra-action.

space. For me, there is a connection here between psychometry and the “quantum theory of touching” (Barad, “On Touching” 156), both operating on the same principles of electromagnetic energies for reading and handling matter. Working in this way, Squirrealism activates an aesthetic-affective openness between species systems to affirm intuition and touch as devices for intuitive interspecies communication.

Holobiont theory recasts the individual organism as a multispecies community and reframes life as fundamentally collaborative. As an artistic expression of multispecies sympoiesis emerged, I began thinking at the cellular level — asking where one material begins and ends, between material and immaterial.

### **The Ecological Turn: From Squirrels to Urban Forests**

My work gradually expanded from squirrels into listening with the Kwetlal food system as it is known in Lekwungen language, and colonially as the Garry oak ecosystem, a subcomponent of the Coastal Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic zone on Vancouver Island.

Garry oak trees emerged after the last glacial retreat roughly 8,000 years ago. This keystone species anchor what is now known as Canada’s most endangered ecosystem—largely confined to the Greater Victoria region where I live. They also occur on adjacent Gulf Islands, plus two isolated groves east of Vancouver. A rare wetland Garry oak stand is found in Courtenay’s Vanier Nature Park, and the northerly population extends as far as Campbell River.

This open woodland savannah is the result of thousands of years of Indigenous agroecological stewardship. Without this stewardship, the landscape would be dominated by closed stands of Douglas fir and Grand-fir.

Considered a living artifact by ləkʷəŋən-speaking peoples, Kwetlal—a flowering bulb—  
continues to be harvested by local Indigenous families today.

Unfortunately, 95% of intact Garry oak ecosystems have been lost.

### **Garry Oak Ecosystem: Time, Pressure, and Private Land**

In the City of Victoria 25% of the urban forest is on public land. 75% of modified Garry oak ecosystems exist on what the municipality refers to as private land which is under constant development pressure.

The Garry oak tree supports over 1,645 co-evolved species, some trees are over 250 years old meeting the provincial definition of old growth for coastal forests. The one in this photo is 500 years old.

It is among these biological entities — temporally connected to settler colonial timelines and boundaries — that my thinking-with and artistic alliances continue to take root.

### **Plastic is Ubiquitous**

Plastic is everywhere. It is in the depths of the oceans and at the highest of mountaintops.

It is in the air we breathe and the water we drink. Microplastic pollution is in the stomachs of beluga whales in the Arctic, and the placenta of the human-animal.

This grey squirrel was photographed in 2020 carrying plastic bags to build a nest.

Squirrels and humans are mutually constituted by these discarded materials.

## **Pandemic Ecologies and Urban Foraging**

Towards the middle of March 2020, as COVID-19 pandemic announcements began to intensify in our region, blue nitrile gloves began appearing in recycling bins and street gutters indexing fears about contagion while also shifting the landscape for urban foragers. As part of my practice, I foraged on my street in squirrealist communion, feeling keenly aware of my own animality.

My exhibition, *Becoming Plastic* at Deluge Contemporary Art comprised assemblages, photographs and installation that imagines body parts, human and more than human, as disembodied components with the potential to re-assemble into social/natural becomings.

The selected artworks feature hands in various forms but are rendered uncanny—seemingly growing copious amounts of hair from the nails and skin, wearing distinct blue nitrile gloves referencing broader anxieties surrounding zoonotic viral transmission between the species.

## **Molecular and Cellular Becoming**

In the artwork *Molecular*, I channeled Squirrealism by collecting acorns and cedar boughs beneath a variety of Garry oak and coniferous trees inhabited by grey squirrels. I noticed several plastic mesh tree guards used to protect newly planted seedlings from grey squirrels and stashed one away.

Returning to the studio, my hands attuned to the materials while weaving cedar boughs and human hair into the warp and weft of the plastic tree protector, as images of multiple species nesting and ingesting plastic entered my mind. *Molecular* (2020) emerged as an assemblage related to mixing, breathing, microbes, cohesion, and adhesion — like early

stages of cellular formation of molecules in developmental biology.

Handling materials to create the assemblage *Molecular* (2020) prompted corporeal sensations and textures of new thought.

### **Hands, Gloves, and Clairvoyant Matter**

Plastic can also be understood as a clairvoyant medium, helping us to communicate with the remains of long-dead organisms to speculate a future becoming—with all that we touch and are touched by.

What interests me is the role of hands as a connector to alternative psychic states – the hand as a biological appendage reaching out through the air, and as a scientific appendage, and the blue nitrile glove (a hand's double) found common ground as a weird, uncanny object of creative outputs.

### **Rituals of Care**

One afternoon, while watering the Garry oak seedlings I had grown from acorns on my deck—and wearing blue nitrile gloves from an earlier caregiving task—I hovered my hands above a seedling. I wondered how the seedling experienced my hand — and the glove. I began to reflect on human hand wearing a blue nitrile glove-demonstrating the plurality of plastic and medical supply waste in acts of protection and care between the species.

*Rituals of Care* emerged from this moment, reflecting on how microscopic and imperceptible molecules are both biological and metaphysical.

## **Interspecies Communication Beyond Mammals**

Furthering my artistic process of interspecies communication, I extended my exploration to include native oak gall wasps.

In my urban forest advocacy work, I serve as a Director with the Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society, which operates a nursery where we grow oak seedlings from acorns and distribute them throughout the region. It was from this nursery that the oak galls were collected.

Oak galls are plant growths found on the foliage and twigs of many oak species, produced by small oak gall wasps—tiny cohabitants that have co-evolved with the Garry oak tree. The galls are composed of plant tissue and form when an insect secretes chemicals that disrupt normal plant cell growth. Adult wasps lay eggs in expanding tree buds and leaves in the spring; the larvae feed, and later emerge from the galls as adults.

### **Psychometric Dialogue and Consent**

For this experiment, I directly asked a question to the oak gall wasps, rather than simply activating psychic experience through touch and allowing my mind to fill with images while proposing a question. In this instance, I sought to communicate consciously with the gall wasp family. I began by asking for permission to engage with them. I found that by asking for permission to collaborate, it resulted in a faster “illumination” of my mind’s eye, and with more detail.

Because oak gall wasps are not tethered by ownership, it’s up to them whether they interact with us (and our constructed habitats) or not. Vanessa Watts details this agency

when she shares that it's "not only the animals' ability to communicate with us, but their willingness to communicate with us" that should be considered (56).

Process detail:

I washed and dried my hands, grounded myself with three deep breaths, and then resumed normal breathing. I held the oak gall and asked: How did you co-evolve with the

Garry oak tree?

Images of thought:

Our ancestors and same generation metamorphosis of leaf fibre, movement, motion, circular, sea anomie, burrowing, mimicking the acorn. We had a taste for the acorn as

food, evolved learning from the oak tree, but originally used old acorn shells to reproduce. Images of a pink neural network of netting repeated again and again.

Ancestors used the same knowledge of the oak tree to create their nest. End of transmission.

Through this process, the gall wasp became both teacher and collaborator, reminding me that even the smallest beings leave legible marks on the world's energetic surface.

### **Speckled Gall Wasp Emergence**

These oak galls were collected for me to gift to a woman who was making oak gall ink. Not knowing whether all of the wasps had vacated, I left them outside on my deck beside the Garry oak seedlings.

When I returned to check on them, a small wasp suddenly emerged from one of the galls and lifted into the air, landing in a nearby planter.

I was stunned — I couldn't believe that I had just witnessed the emergence of a gall wasp, and that I would be able to photograph them. With many thanks to this gall wasp for allowing me to share their presence with you today.

### **Tree Communication and Urban Infrastructure**

For my final communication, I returned to work with a mature Garry oak tree. Across our region on southern Vancouver Island, new roads and construction sites are proliferating, placing ever-increasing pressure on the survival of the rare Garry oak tree species and ecosystem.

While walking and foraging for materials, I began collecting fragments of construction debris—orange plastic fencing—from around Garry oak trees in the area.

### **Voronoi Patterns and Communication Grids**

I soon came upon a centuries-old tree that had lost a massive limb after nearby roadwork.

The remnants of the large branch failure had been removed, leaving only mounds of sawdust—the powdered memory of a thousand seasons. I scooped the sawdust up with my hands.

Back in my studio, I performed Squirrealism—and this time by first washing my hands to clear the energy. I then took three deep breaths to centre myself, and asked the Garry oak for permission to communicate with my hands and to work with their matter.

I immersed my bare hands in their sawdust and asked the tree: What is your greatest concern for survival?

## Memory of a Thousand Seasons

The answer came as images—suffocation, division, containment mistaken for protection. I moved my hands through the sawdust I also held and moved around other materials like orange fencing collected from the site and wondered whether the oak trees could “feel” the presence of plastic through altered microclimates, soil aeration, and mycorrhizal networks.

Rather than contamination from plastic, the message seemed to be about communication and grid systems—about maintaining connection through imposed boundaries. Garry oak bark has a raised cell structure defined by fissures, echoing natural patterns for spacing and growth. The cells reminded me of microbiology, and the aesthetic affect resembled a cell battery. Later, I learned that Garry oak bark contains calcium—essential for communication in both tree and human cellular systems, as do batteries that employ calcium ions.

I began to see how the bark resembled Voronoi patterns (Voh-roh-NOY) — natural communication grids. I realized the message wasn’t about plastic contamination, but about connection through imposed boundaries.

Interestingly, I have since learned that in wireless networks, Voronoi clustering improves communication—an unexpected kinship of forest logic.

I asked the tree if other humans would be allowed to “feel” them in this interactive artwork. They were open, therefore this will be an interactive piece.

In the artwork *Memory of a Thousand Seasons*, viewers are invited to hover their hands above the 500-year-old oak bark, fencing, and sawdust to listen for themselves to the

Garry oak “battery” and see what images arise.

What questions will you ask? What do you sense this species needs to survive?

### **Art as Ecological Translation**

Through Squirrealism, psychometry, and interspecies listening, I’ve come to see art as a  
form of ecological translation.

Where intuition becomes method.

Where materials become mediators.

Where communication becomes survival.

From sensing with squirrels, to listening with forests,

Squirrealism is my practice of learning how to listen-with —to become perceptually  
available to relations that already exist.

### **Squirrel For Mayor**

[www.squirrelformayor.com](http://www.squirrelformayor.com)

Through Squirrealism, I learned how to listen-with.

If touching is a matter of response-ability, then what happens when what we hear is not  
poetic, but political?

As development pressures intensify across Garry oak ecosystems in my region, I began to  
ask:

How does interspecies listening translate into civic action?

How does a practice rooted in intuitive attunement scale to municipal governance?

Squirrel For Mayor emerged from that question.

It is the moment when Squirrealism leaves the studio and enters City Hall.

### **Squirrel for Mayor Video**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUQ9AY20cqg>

As you heard, *Squirrel for Mayor* is a research-creation project that combines arts-based methodologies and community engagement to examine growing concerns about urban forest and tree health, as well as the role of public participation in effective urban forest governance.

Publications to date include a website featuring blog posts and documentation of activities such as reporting and writing on local issues, including tree protection bylaws, development proposals, and community-led efforts to protect green and ecologically significant spaces.

The project has also included participation in rallies such as “A Rally to Save the Centennial Sequoia,” as well as collaboration with the Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society on LiDAR (Light Detection and Radar) aerial mapping projects. These projects generate high-resolution urban forest data, with the possibility of bridging art and science, and providing data to activism.

### **Precedents: Performance, Satire, and Civic Tools**

The performative and arts-based dimension of *Squirrel for Mayor* draws inspiration from Vancouver artist Vincent Trasov, who assumed the persona of the well-known Planters logo character Mr. Peanut as the framework for an ongoing performance art project.

In 1974, Trasov registered Mr. Peanut as an official candidate in the Vancouver mayoral election. Trasov was co-founder and co-director of the Western Front Society in Vancouver. As part of the campaign, Mr. Peanut attended debates and civic meetings, interacted with the public, and gave press interviews. The campaign blended satire with civic critique and ultimately received 2,685 votes (3.4% of the total vote).

Similarly, the environmental accountability efforts that inspired Mr. Floatie demonstrate how satire can influence infrastructure and public policy. Mr. Floatie was a highly strategic protest mascot created to draw attention to the dumping of approximately 35 million gallons of raw sewage per day into the waters off Greater Victoria.

Created on April Fool's Day in 2004 by elementary school teacher James Skwarok (square rek), Mr. Floatie emerged through the spoof organization People Opposed to Outfall Pollution (POOP). While humorous in form, the campaign addressed serious concerns about marine pollution, public health, and governmental delays in wastewater treatment infrastructure.

The sustained public attention generated political momentum. Mr. Floatie was retired in 2017 after the Capital Regional District Board approved the construction of a sewage treatment facility at McLoughlin Point in Esquimalt, which was completed in 2020. Mr. Floatie is widely credited with contributing to the success of this 800-million-dollar infrastructure project.

It is through these precedents that Squirrel for Mayor is positioned as a civic tool—using humour and performative politics to bring ecological governance issues into public consciousness.

## **Operation Inflation**

*Operation Inflation* is an activist initiative that crowdfunds and distributes inflatable

costumes to protesters to shift the narrative and de-escalate tensions during demonstrations and a contemporary example of costume as strategic civic theatre.

In October 2025 dancing frogs, peacocks, unicorns, and a squirrel outside the federal immigration building present a joyful contrast to the current administration's portrait of the Oregon city outside an immigration facility in Portland.

The absurdity of adults dancing in inflatable costumes during anti-ICE demonstrations is meant to display community joy, protesters say, and helps to dispel the government administration's narrative that Portland is a crime-ridden "war zone," a characterization local and state leaders say is false.

A person who was wearing regular clothes, stood nearby, carefully picking out more costumes to order online for demonstrators. Their teenage daughter and her friends passed out pizza slices to the demonstrators.

"Should I go with the unicorn?" he mused before selecting a range of animals, including a lobster, a shark and a bear.

"I already ordered a squirrel," Wilson confessed with a grin.

### **Final: Listening as Response-Ability**

Squirrealism began with touch, and what touches us.

While holding an injured squirrel.

With asking a tree for permission.

It taught me that listening is practice.

It is response-ability.

Squirrel for Mayor is what happens  
when listening leaves the studio  
and enters City Hall.

When creative activism becomes a civic sensor.

When art becomes ecological translation.

When interspecies attunement questions governance.

If the land is thinking,  
and we are entangled in its thought —  
What might be remembered,  
and what might be returned  
if we began listening to the land itself?

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