

NEAR DWELLERS

THE TREE MUSEUM & STREET ROAD AUGUST 2023 – SEPTEMBER 2024

**JESSE GARBE
DOUG LAFORTUNE**

**NEAR DWELLERS
AS URBANITES**

MAY 3 – SEPTEMBER 28, 2024

NEAR DWELLERS AND THE SHARING OF BREATH

SARAH LE QUANG SANG

AUGUST 4 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2023

NEAR DWELLERS AS LEGAL BEINGS

FAWN DAPHNE PLESSNER

AND SUSANNA KAMON

OCTOBER 13 – DECEMBER 30, 2023

NEAR DWELLERS AS CREATIVE COLLABORATORS

RUTH K. BURKE AND JULIE ANDREYEV

FEBRUARY 2 – APRIL 13, 2024

NEAR DWELLERS AS URBANITES

JESSE GARBE AND DOUGLAS LAFORTUNE

MAY 3 – JULY 14, 2024

NEAR DWELLERS FINALE & SYMPOSIUM

BY YOU, OUR COMMUNITY,

WITH YOUR NEAR DWELLERS

AUGUST 9 – SEPTEMBER 28, 2024



JESSE GARBE DOUG LAFORTUNE

NEAR DWELLERS AS URBANITES

Near Dwellers is an exploration of animal-human relationships in five parts, with a focus on interspecies interdependencies in the spaces and places we share.

Through the lens of artists and scholars who work intimately with animals and/or with their representation, Near Dwellers opens up new and multi-faceted ways of troubling the purported human-animal divide.



Inside cover – Doug LaFortune, Detail of WEXES project showing from top to bottom:
Salmon, Frog, Raven, Eagle, Whale, Bear and Wolf.
Colored markers on paper, 2024.

Figure 1 – Doug LaFortune, drawings from the WEXES project.
Clockwise from top left: Sasquatch, Turtle Island, Raven and Moon, Snake.
Colored markers on paper, 2024.

The fourth exhibition in the Near Dwellers series brings together artists Doug LaFortune and Jesse Garbe.

Both artists focus our attention on the pictorial representation of animals and provide us with opportunities to explore, from Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, the role that visual art plays in shaping human-animal relations.

Doug LaFortune is a member of the WSÁNEĆ (Saanich) First Nation, located on the Southwest Coast of what is now known as Canada. He and his wife Kathy are esteemed Elders within their community, a role that is bestowed on individuals as valued knowledge keepers. For over 50 years, Doug has been an active master carver, creating numerous monumental wooden sculptures – aka poles – that have been installed at important public sites (universities, airports, national tourist attractions etc.) within the traditional lands of the WSÁNEĆ peoples. His carvings, prints and drawings are included in national and international private and public collections alike, including museums in Canada, Scotland, and Japan.

Jesse Garbe is of settler origin and is also based in Southwestern Canada. His drawings and paintings are centered on critiquing the genre of nature painting in Western European and early American art, and especially the use of the diorama within Natural History museums, and the role of the Field Guide within natural history discourses. His work highlights how perceptions of animals are shaped by

such methods of display and identification, to undergird wider colonial imaginings and understandings of animal life as marginal, objectified, and/or spectacularized.

These artists also live within a terrain that is undergoing extensive and intensive urbanization and industrialization, with vast expanses of forests and waterways currently being destroyed to make way for suburbs, highways, shipping, pipelines, mining, and so forth. Their artwork therefore draws us into an exploration of two pressing questions: (1) What do such pictorial representations tell us about the legacy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous values and practices toward the more-than-human world?; and (2) How do such images of animals – i.e., the cultural work of capturing the imagination – engage our potential for empathy and understanding, especially in relation to animal encounters within a place and time when animal lives are being systematically decimated?

On view is a selection of drawings from LaFortune's project called WEXES (pronounced 'weck-es' in SENCOTEN, the WSÁNEĆ language). WEXES, meaning the Moon of the Frog, signals the appearance of the new full moon and the beginning of the seasonal change from Winter to Spring: "the rebirth of the earth." This moon also marks the moment when a local hibernating frog – as seen in many of LaFortune's drawings – literally emerges as the earth warms, and indeed, within



Figure 2 – an example of Doug LaFortune’s morning postings on Facebook, 2024.

WSÁNEĆ territory, one hears the chirping of their collective voices throughout late February and March as they rise and greet the new world. The frog is also seen as the Keeper of the Sacred Season* and prompts the commencement of traditional ceremonies and land-based cultural practices, such as collecting medicines and foods and so forth. LaFortune’s WEXES project therefore carries these nuanced meanings of awakening and is embodied in his ritual of rising early, coffee cup in hand, to prepare himself for the day through the act of drawing. Tenderly – and caffeinated! – with ears and eyes attuned to the seasonal

* Note: This is similar to the meaning of February, which originates in the Latin word ‘februarius’: to purify.

moment and the many critters who reside nearby, in his drawings he weaves together sightings of his animal neighbors, sometimes with reference to important family events or of friends who have crossed over, sometimes inflected with humorous commentaries on wider social, political, or cultural affairs, always bringing into conversation the vast network of human-animal relations to tell each morning’s story. Importantly too, since 2016, these drawings have been shared on Facebook each day with his community of 4000+ followers, many of whom have embraced the work as a gift of sorts with which to start their own day (figure 2). This act of sharing embodies the pulse and rhythm of WSÁNEĆ values and culture made visible in LaFortune’s intimate, and



Figure 3 – Doug LaFortune. Installation view of WEXES project at Street Road, 2024.

sometimes sentimental, renderings that are responsive to the cycle of seasonal time and the daily promise of renewed life. LaFortune's Facebook posts are also accompanied by his witty or droll pronouncements and it is clear that his followers relish his sweet-natured, gentle commentary in the abundance of hearts and likes.

The selection of drawings (figure 3) on view in the exhibition is arranged to trace LaFortune's daily practice: on the left-hand side, the first two columns celebrate animals – human and more-than-human alike – hunting Chum salmon. Salmon is without doubt a key food source, and much of WSÁNEĆ culture pivots on honoring these animals for their importance in sustaining and upholding the vast network of human and animal interdependen-

cies, upon whom all life depends. Each subsequent set of columns captures moments in winter, spring (with the frog again featured), and then summer, connecting us to a wider vocabulary of animal symbolism and layered meanings in the cycle of time.

Alongside the wall of drawings that highlight the seasons are other pictures from the WEXES project. The four images of animals (figure 1) – Sasquatch, the turtle, raven, and snake – are just a few of the many animals that are key actors in WSÁNEĆ traditional stories, some of whom are supernatural beings, such as the snake and Sasquatch. The raven figures prominently in important origin stories of the WSÁNEĆ people and the telling of their history within their territory, and the turtle is



more widely celebrated by numerous Nations across Canada as a symbol of Turtle Island, i.e., the land mass of North America.

Adjacent to these images are a set of three drawings, two of which are also works from the WEXES project (figure 4) that speak to LaFortune's sensitivity to more emotionally charged or spectacular events, such as mourning a late friend who swam alongside orca whales or seeing the cresting of an orca as it rose from the waters, its fin dwarfing the height of a boat. Shown with these images is a poem (figure 4 – top) by Kathy LaFortune, Doug's life-long partner, that is illustrated with a wolf's paw prints by Doug. This piece commemorates the fate of a famous sea wolf called Takaya who traversed WSÁNEĆ territory, and captures the tragedy of colonial violence in all its forms: from the ruination of the wolf's home – both land and sea – to the wolf's tragic fate in the hands of the state who orchestrated its capture and removal, only for it to then be killed by a trophy hunter. Kathy LaFortune poignantly expresses the existential challenges of animals caught in the mess of destructive colonial logics and practices in the urbanization and industrialization of their terrain. As she says, when "Mother's forests are gone. [...] Everything is different, Strange."

Animals therefore figure prominently in the LaFortunes' life and art in multi-layered and complex ways. Each animal is a potent symbol long-forged within WSÁNEĆ culture

Figure 4 – Kathy and Doug LaFortune. Kathy LaFortune's Wolf-Takaya poem (top), 2024. Doug LaFortune's illustrations (top, middle, bottom), 2024.

to represent a wide array of human-animal relationships and interdependencies enacted through clan and personal names, ceremony, and cultural practices connected to the changes of seasons and spiritual sites within their traditional territory. Animals are also freighted with traditional stories that teach and, indeed, remind humans about the implicit (spiritual and social) responsibilities to the non-human world – i.e., lessons that underpin WSÁNEĆ laws and systems of governance. However, LaFortune's animals are also a personal lexicon of sorts and convey his emotions in place and time. These tender and honest drawings speak of the intimate experience of a man's inextricable connection to the perpetually busy, vibrant, pulsating rhythms of all animal life – human and more-than-human alike – that rises and falls each day, in sunshine, wind, rain, or thunder, alongside the sea, the islands, mountains, the moons, spilling into his rendering of those he loves and cares for and all the animating spirits of his daily world.

Jesse Garbe offers us a waggish interrogation of the conceptual and pictorial conventions of ornithological field guides. The main project on view, "A Field Guide to the Gift Shop of Terra Nova National Park" (2010), (figures 5 and 6) is a wry critique of the act of observation as objectification and the spectacle of wildlife tourism that has its roots in the exploits of 18th and 19th century naturalists. No doubt too, as this Field

Guide is the result of an artist's residency, one can surmise that the very act of travelling across Canada to undertake his study of the park and its animals is itself a form of parody of early naturalists as they traversed the globe spying 'exotic' critters in breathtaking landscapes. Terra Nova Park encompasses the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq First Nation; a vast expanse of terrain on the northeast coast of the Canadian provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador that takes in almost 400 square kilometers of forested lands that include the remnants of the Appalachian Mountains and the Eastern Island Boreal region. It is also, of course, home to numerous animals that live their lives relatively free of the exploits of developers and industrialists.

The Field Guide therefore draws on these various contexts. With a double-edged take on the enterprise of observation within Western art and the natural sciences, Garbe points up the legacy of how colonialist modes of representation continue to inform perceptions of animals to this day. For example, located in the heart of this monumental landscape, with its various animal communities going about their business, sits a visitors' center and, of course, because the park is a destination for tourists, a gift shop. An array of trinkets populates the shop, as one would expect, but Garbe's Field Guide has focused our attention on the predominance of images of birds that adorn book covers, posters, t-shirts,



Figure 5 – Jesse Garbe, *A Field Guide to the Gift Shop of Terra Nova National Park* installed at Street Road, 2024. Gouache paintings on paper, 2010.

coffee mugs, and numerous other items of merchandise. However, the irony here is that the birds that are featured are not all native to Terra Nova, and none appear dull. Instead, as Garbe's project makes clear, we see the richly colored plumage of a multitude of mostly male songbirds from the United Kingdom and Europe set amongst birds from across North America, the Antarctic, and the Arctic. Warblers, Nuthatches, Puffins, and Gulls are placed alongside birds of prey and an imaginary Pink Penguin of the Emperor Variety!

What do such representations tell

us about what is being seen, and the ways in which we have been educated to see? Garbe's *Field Guide* deftly captures the concatenation of pictures informing pictures within the tradition of Western art. From the representations of birds first forged in the 19th century by illustrator-naturalists such as John James Audubon, to their translation into illustrations on gift shop merchandise, to Garbe's reproductions, the Guide troubles the very act of looking. As the British art theorist John Berger notes in his seminal book, *Why Look at Animals?*, "animals



Figure 6 – Jesse Garbe, details from the *Field Guide*: (the Terra Nova gift shop is within the range of some but by no means all species in Garbe's collection) : Center: Eurasian Blue Tit, Clockwise from top left: Atlantic Puffin, Goshawk, Mountain Bluebird (found in western North America), Pink Pengu of the Emporer Variety, Emporer Pengu, Greater Yellowlegs. Gouache paint on paper, 2010.

are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. What we know of them [and indeed, how we know them] is an index of our power and thus an index of what separates us from them" (2009). Garbe's project astutely captures Berger's insights about the legacy of the imperial gaze with a pithy appreciation that the life of a wild animal has become an ideal, withdrawn from daily life. As Berger says, "The reproduction of animals in images – as their biological reproduction in birth becomes a rarer and rarer sight – [forced us] to make

animals ever more exotic and remote" (2009).

Two more of Garbe's projects drive home Berger's warning of the proliferation of animal imagery coinciding with escalating animal extinctions. Garbe's rendering of Blue Jays, Cardinals and Orioles (2011) – symbols of three famous baseball teams (figure 7) – and the animals that are featured on Canadian coins (2011) (figure 8), speak to the ubiquity of animal representations in the construction of (human) group identities.

Adjacent to these drawings sits a



Figure 7 – Jesse Garbe. Installation view of songbirds drawings from sports teams' logos displayed alongside fabric sports team patches. Left to right: Orioles, Blue Jays and Cardinals. Gouache paint on paper, 2011.



Figure 8 – Jesse Garbe. Drawings of animals on Canadian coins. Top left: Loon. Top right: Caribou. Bottom Left: Polar Bear. Bottom right: Beaver. Gouache paint on paper, 2011.

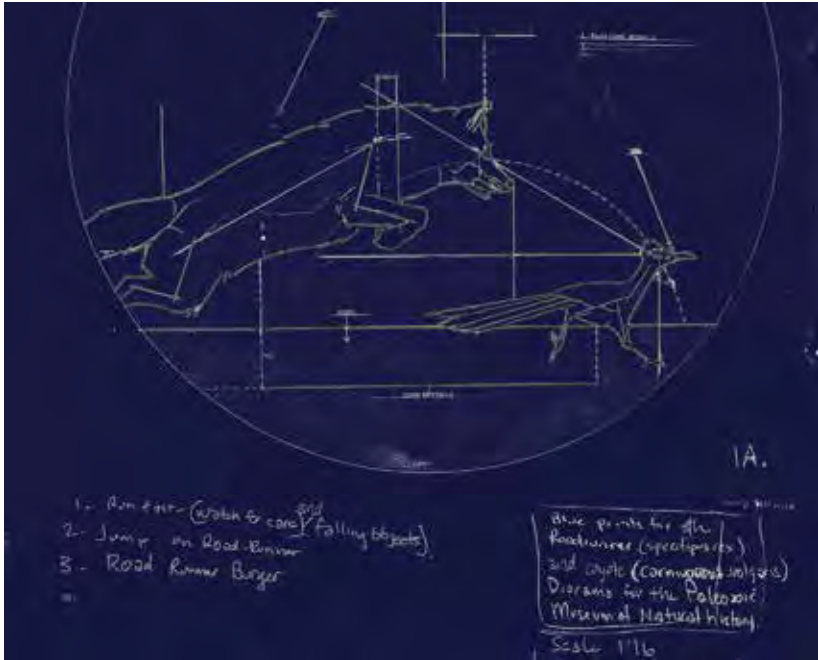


Figure 9 – Jesse Garbe. Detail of blueprint for the Roadrunner (*Speedipus Rex*) and Coyote (*Carnivorous-Volgaris*) Diorama for the Paleozoic Museum of Natural History. Digital print, 2010.

Inside back cover – Jesse Garbe. Flying Puffin, from the series *A Field Guide to the Gift Shop of Terra Nova National Park*. Gouache paint on paper, 2010.

large diagram of the Warner Bros. cartoon character Wile E. Coyote leaping in pursuit of the equally famous Road Runner, called "Blueprint for the Roadrunner (*Speedipus Rex*) and Coyote (*Carnivorous-Volgaris*)" (figure 9). The faux Latin names were running gags within the television series, and Garbe amuses us in his realistic rendering of a coyote and a bird. So too do we see Garbe making light of the trappings of scientific analysis, with the outline of the animals presented in silhouette with arrows and lines measuring the hypothetical

speed of the chase, the characters relative scale, jump distance, field of vision, etc.

In using the tools of humor and irony, Garbe playfully denatures the very construct of 'natural history' within the Western canon, and by poking fun at the visual techniques that mold and shape understandings of "what nature looks like," Garbe makes apparent how representations of animals "contain meanings that assist in the maintenance and reproduction of [Western] political and ideological positionings."

Near Dwellers
Public Lecture Series
(online, via Zoom)

Street Road and the Tree Museum cordially invite you to join us for discussions of human-animal relations between the artists exhibiting and guest scholars.

Public talks take place from Autumn 2023 through September 2024. Dates and times are announced on Street Road's Near Dwellers' webpage and will subsequently be published as a collection of podcasts.

For the Near Dwellers as Urbanites panel discussion, guest speaker Peter S. Alagona will be in conversation with the artists, drawing on themes from his recent publication *The Accidental Ecosystem: people and wildlife in American cities*. Environmental historian, conservation scientist, and nature-culture geographer, Alagona is a Professor of Environmental Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

For connection details, date and time, and further information about the full year's programming, artists, and speakers, please visit our website, and sign up for our mailing list:

www.streetroad.org/near-dwellers

For more about Doug LaFortune's work, visit:
<https://www.facebook.com/doug.lafortune.3>

For more about Jesse Garbe's work, visit:
www.jessegarbe.com



TREE MUSEUM

The Near Dwellers exhibition program is a collaboration between Street Road Artists Space, located in Cochranville, Pennsylvania, and the Tree Museum, located on Pender Island, British Columbia.

Exhibitions and performances for Near Dwellers are sited principally at Street Road Artists Space.

All public talks will take place on Zoom.

For more information about the Tree Museum see:
www.tree-museum.com

Visiting

Street Road is open Fridays and Saturdays 11am-3pm, and by appointment

Virtual visits can be arranged.

Street Road Artists Space
725 Street Road
Cochranville, PA 19330

Contact

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NEAR DWELLERS

AUGUST 2023 – SEPTEMBER 2024 THE TREE MUSEUM & STREET MALL



Near Dwellers is an exploration of words for our relationships in the past, with a focus on interpretive challenges in the space and time we live in.

Through the art of urban sculpture in a word identity will be used to create the representation. Near Dwellers opens a new world beyond ways of looking beyond the horizon.



NEAR DWELLERS AND THE CHALLENGE OF DESIGN

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