



INTERTWINED HISTORIES: Plants in their Social Contexts

Edited by Jim Ellis

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Mrs. George Catt holding the 20 pound cabbage she grew in her garden, Calgary, Alberta, 1965. Glenbow Archives, PA-1599-278-12.

contributors

Nikki Anguish is a horticulturalist with a professional focus in arboriculture. As an urban forestry superintendent with Calgary Parks, she has managed the Civic Tree Nursery and worked on the Re-Tree project responsible for the initial response, recovery, and subsequent reforestation of Calgary's urban canopy after the snowstorm of 2014 dubbed "Snowtember" decimated the urban forest. Having grown up in small-town Saskatchewan, she has always had a passion for trees; she is fortunate to be able to use her passion to benefit present and future Calgarians.

James F. Cahill Jr. is the head of the Cahill Lab of Experimental Plant Ecology at the University of Alberta. He maintains that plants do "behave" and lead anything but solitary and sedentary lives. He has a particular fondness for trying to understand how plants forage for resources, cope with enemies, and alter competitive strategies over ecological and evolutionary time scales. A key goal of this work is to understand how these social and behavioural interactions impact patterns of biodiversity, and the functioning of natural systems. He has appeared on *Nature* (PBS) and *The Nature of Things* (CBC) in recent years, showing viewers that plants are a lot more like animals than we ever imagined.

Jim Ellis is a professor of English and director of the Calgary Institute for the Humanities. He is the author of *Sexuality and Citizenship* (2003) and *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations* (2009), and the editor of the previous volumes in the CIH's Community Seminar series, *Calgary, City of Animals* (University of Calgary Press, 2017) and *Water Rites: Reimagining Water in the West* (University of Calgary Press, 2018).

Erina Harris is a Canadian poet. She is the author of *The Stag Head Spoke* (2014). She is a former Calgary Institute of the Humanities Frances Spratt Graduate Fellow, and is currently conducting a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship in Poetics and Pedagogy at the University of Alberta. She is at work editing the poetry manuscript *Persephone's Abecedarium: An Alphabet Play (An Eco-poetical Adaptation of the "Hymn to Demeter")*.

M. N. Hutchinson has been a working photographer for over thirty years, with a commercial business that included album covers for A&M Records and being a nationally recognized professional artist. His practice has been contrarily cross-media. He has exhibited photographs, printmaking, sculptural installations, audio, video, and performance works. He completed his MFA in New Media at the University of Calgary and has presented his work and theories in over twenty lectures and public presentations. He has been the recipient of several grants and awards both nationally and locally. He has also invested a considerable part of his career in the community, having been both a co-director of Truck Gallery and photography facilitator at the Banff Centre, as well as sitting on several boards.

Megan Ljubotina is an MSc student at the University of Alberta who is broadly interested in plant behaviour, and specifically in how plants forage for resources below-ground. She is fascinated by how plants can take in information and respond to their environments in complex and unexpected ways.

Alberta-born artist **Attila Richard Lukacs** graduated from the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1985. Lukacs became famous for his large, ambitious paintings depicting exaggerated masculine figures in the classical tradition. His range as an artist is evident in his stunning abstract paintings and collages as well as a collection of paintings of flowers and trees and numerous etchings.

Habba Mahal is an MSc student studying plant ecology at the University of Alberta in the Cahill Lab. She recently finished her BSc at the U of A, with her undergraduate research on how plants react differently when exposed to the hormones released by the roots of kin plants versus stranger plants. Her graduate work delves deeper into plant behaviour by shifting the focus to plant decision making when faced with tough choices, such as helping kin plants or competing against them for nutrients. When not tending to the plants in her experiments, she can be found expanding her own mini plant-jungle at home and enjoying the great outdoors.

Andrew S. Mathews is an associate professor of Anthropology at the University of California Santa Cruz. His research focuses on the culture of forestry and conservation institutions, from state bureaucracies, to NGOs, to Indigenous communities. Mathews is the author of *Instituting Nature: Authority, Expertise, and Power in Mexican Forests* (MIT Press, 2011). He is committed to integrating natural and social science approaches to environmental problem solving. Mathews is currently working on the historical ecology, natural history, and climate politics of Italian forests. Because Mediterranean ecosystems have evolved to cope with dramatically variable climate, powerful disturbances, and intense human modification, they are good places to learn about climate change.

Ciara McKeown is a public art commissioner, curator, director, producer, and project manager who has worked with multiple arts organizations across Canada and the United States for over a decade. She has recently started her own practice writing, researching, and working with clients on public art planning. Ciara is an executive board member with Public Art Dialogue, and was co-organizer of “Public Art: New Ways of Thinking and Working,” a symposium hosted by York University in May 2017. The first of its kind in Canada, the symposium invited cross-disciplinary perspectives and research to critically examine the current state of Canadian contemporary public art practices. Ciara holds an MA from New York University and a BA from McGill University.

Wes Olson worked for several years as a wildlife technician for the Yukon Government and then, after a stint at the Banff School of Fine Arts in 1981, began a career with Parks Canada as a National Park Warden in Banff, Waterton Lakes, Elk Island, Prince Albert, and Grasslands National Parks. He has the unique ability to combine his extensive scientific knowledge about bison with his talents using graphite, watercolour, oil painting, and mixed medium artwork to capture the buffalo and other wildlife in their natural environments. With photographer Johane Janelle, he is co-author of the books *Portraits of the Bison: An Illustrated Guide to Bison Society* (2005) and *A Field Guide to Plains Bison* (2011).

Laura St. Pierre is a visual artist based in Saskatoon. Her installations, photographs, and video works have been exhibited throughout Canada and abroad. Since completing an MFA at Concordia University in Montreal, she has received numerous grants and awards from provincial funding bodies and the Canada Council for the Arts. Recent exhibitions include *Winter Garden* at VivianeArt (Calgary) as part of the Exposure Photography Festival; *The Museum of Future History* at the Dunlop Art Gallery (Regina), the Maison des Artistes (Winnipeg), and *Foire papier* (Montreal); *“La vie fragile”* at Galerie LUZ du Belgo (Montreal); and *Spectral Garden II* at PAVED Arts (Saskatoon).

Nancy Tousley, recipient of a Governor General’s Award for Visual and Media Arts for outstanding contribution in 2011, is a senior art critic, arts journalist, and independent curator. Her work has been recognized with many prestigious awards, including the Board of Governors of the Alberta College of Art and Design Award of Excellence (1997), the Ontario Association of Art Galleries award for best curatorial writing on contemporary art (1999 and 2001), the Canadian Museums Association’s award for outstanding achievement in arts journalism (2002), and the medal of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (2009). She was named a Fellow of the Glenbow Museum in 2018.

Patrícia Vieira is an associate professor and researcher at the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra / Georgetown University. Her latest books are *States of Grace: Utopia in Brazilian Culture* (SUNY University Press, 2018) and the co-edited volume *The Language of Plants: Science, Philosophy, Literature* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017). Many of her studies contribute to the debate on the complex relationship between humans and non-human beings. For more information, check www.patriciavieira.net.

Jennifer Wanner is a multidisciplinary visual artist based in Calgary, Alberta, who has exhibited in Poland and throughout Canada at galleries such as the Glenbow (Calgary) and the Dunlop Art Gallery (Regina). Her work explores how art-historical constructs and scientific objective means of observing the natural world have shaped our Western concept of nature. She holds a BFA from the University of Calgary and ACAD, as well as an MFA from Western University. Her work is in the collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and was included in the 2013 Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art. She is represented by the Paul Kuhn Gallery.

Katherine Ylitalo is an independent curator, writer, and educator with extensive museum experience in western Canada, and special interest in contemporary art and gardens. A graduate of Stanford University, she has taught at colleges and universities in Ontario, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Currently she works at the Founders' Gallery, University of Calgary at The Military Museums of Calgary and is curator at Bow Valley College. A Master Gardener, garden historian, and horticulturalist, she has helped to steward the MacDonald Butterfly Garden at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre since 2008.



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intertwined histories

plants in their social contexts

How do we understand the boundaries of individual creatures?

What are the systems of interdependency that bind all living creatures together?

Plants were among the the first to colonize the planet. They created the soil and the atmosphere that made life possible for animals. They are some of the largest and oldest life forms on Earth. In spite of their primacy, Western cultures have traditionally regarded plants as the lowest life forms, lacking mobility, sensation, and communication. But recent research argues that plants move and respond to their environment, communicate with each other, and form partnerships with other species.

Art, poetry, and essays by cultural anthropologists, experimental plant biologists, philosophers, botanists and foresters expose the complex interactions of the vibrant living world around us and give us a lens through which we can explore our intertwined histories.

***Jim Ellis** is Professor of English and Director of the Calgary Institute for the Humanities at the University of Calgary. He has written widely on art, literature, and film.*



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