

NEAR DWELLERS

THE TREE MUSEUM & STREET ROAD

NEAR DWELLERS AS INDWELLERS

OCTOBER 1 - DECEMBER 16, 2025

Near Dwellers is an ongoing series exploring animal-human relationships, 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.



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AS INDWELLERS**

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**BOTHKINDS PROJECT SPACE
VANCOUVER, BC**



The urban environment is widely conceived and designed to meet the needs and desires of human beings. However, with the expansion of urbanization, industrialization, extraction industries, and intensive farming, deforestation has intensified, climate change has become a persistent concern, and species loss has escalated.⁽¹⁾ For the more-than-human animals⁽²⁾ that survive the immediate impacts of human actions, they have had to quickly adapt to new environments—leaving them exposed and vulnerable, without places to forage, seek refuge, or sustain their communities.

Equally, human and wild animals increasingly converge or overlap within urban spaces—particularly in Canada, where suburbs and industrial expansion accelerate in the push to meet human aspirations for homes, energy, and resource extraction. The philosopher Matthew Calarco encapsulates the problem and points to a way forward. As he says:

"Climate change, defaunation, and other forms of ecological degradation are poised to bring about—and have to some extent brought about—a new world wherein traditional categories of relation (wild, domestic, and so on) are, for better or worse, thrown wide open. [...] If our aim is to live justly with and alongside animals, might it not be preferable to work toward transforming urban and other human-centered environments to maximize the range of animal potentials rather than taking those environments for granted? [...]"

Need we accept the institutional arrangements of contemporary urban life as we currently find them and try not to fit various species of animals into them? Why not proceed in the opposite direction and seek to rearrange [human] social life with the lives and deaths of animals and other more than human beings as the main concern?"⁽³⁾

Calarco goes on to discuss the early work of Jennifer Wolch (1998) and draws attention to her insight that "urban environments are to be understood as both a reflection of the anthropocentrism of their inhabitants and as one of the chief means whereby anthropocentric ideologies and material realities are reinforced and intensified."⁽⁴⁾

The material reality of urban spaces—urban and suburban ways of life—are geographically arranged so as to:

"separate human beings from animals physically and architecturally through such means as road construction, fencing, home building, and landscaping.

1. World Wildlife Fund. Website: https://wwf.panda.org/discover/our_focus/biodiversity/biodiversity/ Accessed on August 5, 2025.

2. The term "more-than-human" was coined by philosopher and ecologist David Abrams.

3. Calarco, Matthew (2024) - University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, p.62-65.

4. Ibid. p.67



In adopting these ways of life, we remove countless animals from our purview and cut off the possibility of establishing alternative modes of relating with them."⁽⁵⁾

Calarco goes one step further and rightly points out that "many cities do more than simply wall human inhabitants off from animal others; their mode of operation is premised on the instrumental use of animals and on inflicting harm and death on them. [...] In many ways, our contemporary suburban habitats function as 'killer cities,' structurally founded on the violent use and death of animals."⁽⁶⁾

These problems are, of course, widespread and deep. However, the work of Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose provides us with tools for engaging with these problematics by reframing how one might 'see' our animal neighbours. They suggest that places are meaningful to—and are "storied" by—other-than-human beings, pointing out that "a living being is emplaced through its body: that places are formed between bodies and the terrains they inhabit. Within this nexus of body and terrain, specific places become sites of meaning." More specifically, "stories emerge from and impact the way in which places come to be—the material and discursive are all mixed up in the making of places, as with worlds more generally."⁽⁷⁾

Drawing on discussions from previous Near Dwellers shows and speaker series (including, Near Dwellers as Roadkill,

Near Dwellers as Urbanites, Near Dwellers as Collaborators, Near Dwellers as Legal Beings, and Near Dwellers and The Sharing of Breath), and bringing into conversation the work of the authors discussed above (among others), this current iteration—Near Dwellers as Indwellers—focuses its inquiry on animal-human relations as they play out in urban spaces. How are we to understand the urban confluence of multispecies presence and place? Are there other ways to know—and indeed embody—urban spaces as offered by nonhuman animals? And if so, what are the "possibilities for a more equitable multispecies city—a task that is particularly important for those species that are in some way tied or drawn to specific city places, and perhaps especially, in these perilous times, for those whose future is endangered"?"⁽⁸⁾

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose (2012) 'Storied Places in a Multispecies World', in *Humanimalia: a journal of human/animal interface studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, Spring, pp. 1-27

8. Ibid. Also see 'Lively Ethography: Storying Animist Worlds', in *Environmental Humanities* (2016) 8 (1): 77-94. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3527731>. See also Encountering a more-than-human world: ethos and the arts of witness' in *Routledge Companion to Environmental Humanities* (2017), edited by Ursula Heise, Jon Christensen and Michelle Niemann.



The Near Dwellers as Indwellers program is therefore a live workshop, an open forum, a set of thought experiments, and an invitation to imagine a better life lived with our fellow more-than-human neighbours—one that recognizes multispecies achievements in "storying" place. The exhibition of artworks invites reflection and engagement with these concerns, alongside a speaker series and artist-led workshops in which artists, academics, Indigenous Elders, students, and members of the public are welcomed to share their perspectives and consider what it takes to address these issues.

The artworks on display also offer visitors a starting point for engaging with wider problematics, such as the impact of human mobility on animal bodies—their expulsion from terrain, collisions, delimited movement, and other modes of gratuitous violence. Other artworks promise protection, diversion, or sanctuary, prompting us to consider how animals themselves create new worlds in their adaptation to the built environment and human behaviour. Yet other artworks foreground experiences of loss and mourning, encouraging us to care for our near-dwelling friends.

Some of the questions woven into the exhibition's program include: What strategies do wild animals employ to navigate the various terrains and obstacles they encounter? How can a city be reimagined and fitted (or retrofitted) to provide the necessary spaces for animal mobility, foraging, and sanctuary—spaces that support wild animal

communities and "draw us into deeper and more demanding accountabilities of nonhuman others"?

The Indwellers project is therefore an opportunity to explore how the urban environment might be reconceived and (re)designed to guide human users toward being more supportive, conscientious of, and caring toward our fellow animal residents—and to begin addressing how we can publicly foreground newly imagined conditions for living with wild animals as full members of our communities. In short, Indwellers seeks to make new worlds and possibilities visible and audible, opening pathways for us to adapt to the needs of our animal neighbours.

Contributing artists:

Julie Andreyev
Roelof Bakker
Bill Burns
Lou Florence
Jesse Garbe
Adriana Jaroszewicz
Doug LaFortune
Bill Pechet
Fawn Daphne Plessner
Matthew C. Shackelford
Peter Sickert
Thena Tak

NEAR DWELLERS

Begun in 2023, the ongoing Near Dwellers series is a collaboration between Street Road Artists Space, located in Cochranville, Pennsylvania, and the Tree Museum, located on Pender Island, British Columbia.

Components have included:

Near Dwellers and the Sharing of Breath

Sarah Le Quang Sang with Spirit of Saigon
August 4 – September 30, 2023
at Street Road Artists space and online

Near Dwellers as Legal Beings

Fawn Daphne Plessner and Susanna Kamon
October 13 – December 30, 2023
at Street Road Artists space and online

Near Dwellers as Creative Collaborators

Ruth K. Burke and Julie Andreyev
February 2 – April 13, 2024
at Street Road Artists space and online

Near Dwellers as Urbanites

Jesse Garbe and Douglas Lafortune
May 3, 2024 – January 31, 2025
at Street Road Artists space and online

Near Dwellers as Roadkill

Lou Florence
February 15 – May 31, 2025
at Street Road Artists space and online

Near Dwellers as Indwellers

Multiple participants
October 1 – December 31, 2025
at Bothkinds Project Space, Vancouver,
British Columbia and online

Near Dwellers as Friends

Multiple participants
May 30 – August 15, 2026
at Street Road Artists space and online

AN INVITATION

We invite you to join us for ongoing discussions in connection to Near Dwellers: in person, virtual, and hybrid public talks and workshops take place in connection with each of the project's components. A selection of recorded sessions is available online for viewing as is a series of podcasts.

For connection details, and further information about the project's programming, artists, and speakers, please visit our website, sign up for our mailing list, and follow the podcast series.

Street Road : www.streetroad.org/near-dwellers

The Tree Museum: tree-museum.com/near-dwellers

Bothkinds Project Space: bothkindsprojects.ca

SPECIAL THANKS TO

the many people who have so generously given their time and attention to the Near Dwellers project. While there are too many to name individually, we are especially grateful to those who have helped implement the project, as well as to the artists and academics who have formed an important network of interlocutors. Without you, Near Dwellers would not be the rich and thought-provoking inquiry that it is today.

Street Road and the Tree Museum
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TREE MUSEUM



