



Karen Yurkovich

THE HERBARIUM PROJECT

Apple and rose





The Herbarium Project
May 15 to August 27, 2014
The Beaty Biodiversity Museum
Vancouver, BC







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The Project

The Herbarium Project is both a research project and exhibition in collaboration with the Beaty Biodiversity Museum. Over several months I visited and studied the collection, gathering information also from the researchers and curators working there.

Biodiversity is a scientific and ecological theme, although I worked with the Herbarium through an expanded cultural investigation. The research was grounded in the collection and the plants chosen mark a geography as well as a history that traces both movements of people (who bring plants as memory of places they have left to put down roots in a new place) and movements of nature (vegetative life as a constantly adjusting territory to climate changes and human desire).

The work evolved as a construction of narratives intertwining the plants' histories, mythologies, economic significance and symbolism. Elements of classification were important, as the painted plants remain descriptive in their representation and are isolated like both contemporary and ancient herbarium pages. Through painting though, they do not strive for nor create a single unifying narrative. The diverse provenance of the elements that form the compositions and the painterly dimension open up a space that underlines the cultural references they carry. This rewriting of histories or stories without hierarchy recognizes and elaborates the ubiquity with which nature is integrated into our culture and daily lives.

The Paintings

Company You Keep

oil on cotton, 115 x 107 cm.

Company You Keep specifically explores the ideas of co-evolution and adaptation. The painting features two branches, the hazelnut and the salal, the first an immigrant and the second a native plant. My work has previously considered these issues of immigrants and natives in Canada as reflected in the cultures of the people who have used and interacted with certain plants, as well as the desire when migrating or colonizing to bring what is familiar and useful from home into a new environment. This concept can take on the aspect of a biological imperialism, as defined by Alfred Crosby, and I have tried to suggest this in the painting.

The salal branch is the larger, and while very similar in shape to the hazelnut branch, it imposes a change of growth direction in the hazelnut. They have both been colonized by another indistinct plant and the salal infested with blueberries. While the hazelnut has not been infested, it has adapted its nut to take on the blue hue of the berries.



BC Moment

oil on cotton, 120 x 100 cm.

Agriculture (which contains the word culture) includes processes such as cultivation and grafting which, while neutral in nature, are ultimately driven by aesthetics.

As with most life forms, apple trees, when grown from seed, produce variation and genetic diversity. Although this benefits the planet and is the basis for evolution, it is counterproductive if the aim is a consistent apple for the consumer. Fruit trees can only be reproduced true through grafting. BC Moment plays on the trends and fashions in cultivation. The reasons a specific apple is grown today, and the tastes of the consumer to dictate this, have been narrowed to factors such as crunchiness and color, and a uniform sweetness, rather than any of the innumerable possible other reasons, such as use, versatility, or history.

In the painting an aesthetically conscious, grafted branch floats away from a natural branch placed in the lower right corner. The apples are positioned to illustrate a timeline and hierarchy of taste, and those depicted comprise a catalogue of varieties, including several developed in Summerland and other regions in BC. Old lunch-box favorites such as the MacIntosh that many of us grew up with could be a lot harder to find on store shelves over the next decade as the trend to plant sexier varieties of apples grows.

Crawford, T. (May 2012) Growers replant apples with tastier and crunchier varieties. The Vancouver Sun.

The green apple peeking out from behind the leaves at the bottom of the grafted branch is the Northern Spy, which was developed in New York in the 1800s and is considered the quintessential apple for pie. The model came from the UBC Botanical Garden collection, as it is difficult to find outside of specialized gardens. It was one of the first important North American varieties, in terms of consumption, but fell out of favor as an eating apple because of its dull coloration and irregular shape. Near to it are depicted some local crab apples (*Malus fusca*) the only apple native to the Pacific Northwest) which are not widely used anymore.

Moving up the "evolutionary ladder", we find the Spartan and Ambrosia apples in the centre. The Spartan was released in 1936 and the Ambrosia was discovered as a chance seedling in the 1990s in the Similkameen Valley. These varieties are flanked by the Silken on the right and Aurora Golden Gala on the left, both developed after 2000 in Summerland. Consumer taste seems to dictate that the red-yellow varieties are more sought after than the all-yellow varieties.

The crowning apple is the newest BC variety, the Salish. Recently released (and named at the 2012 edition of UBC Apple Fest), it conforms to all the current trends for apples: red, heart (or globe) shaped, sweet, and without a defect to be seen. It seems the perfect apple, if lacking both the patina of time and provenance.



Juglans Regina

oil on cotton, 157 x 170 cm.

This painting began with some principles of Chinese flower arranging, which has an aesthetic sensitive to the linear and calligraphic rather than the prevailing Western artistic maxim of "mass over line". My work constructs relationships between natural objects, and because I am influenced by the aesthetics of botanical illustration, I was interested in adapting my working methods and concepts to another system. My arrangement of these branches plays with elements of both mass and line, as in Chinese flower arranging, but also diverges from it by using non-traditional elements and employing compositional choices based on motives that are best defined as metaphorical.

I chose the pine branch, a prominent plant in Chinese flower arranging, with its meanings of longevity, endurance, and steadfastness. The pine is often depicted in Chinese art with other symbols of longevity such as the peach, the god Sau (god of longevity), and the deer, as well as being mentioned in the tales of the Eight Immortals. In ancient China, many Taoists sought immortality by eating pine cones, resin, and needles. They believed this would help them live a longer life by making their body parts more resilient to harm.

The pine has an unlikely partner, the walnut branch. I chose two different types of walnut, one being *Juglans regia*, native to Central Asia but widespread today, and the other the Chinese walnut or *Juglans mandshurica*. The genus name *Juglans* comes from Roman mythology, and means glans of Jupiter. The walnut is considered a very masculine plant because of its form, and by changing the title from *regia* to *regina* (from male to female) I have emphasized these characteristics. While the walnut tree has no particular symbolic significance in Chinese culture, the nuts are considered lucky and are currently an obsession, where a large, perfectly formed pair can fetch up to \$50,000 at auction. Pairing the pine and its noble characteristics with the more commercial ones of the walnut reflects the differences in priorities that exist and co-exist in all cultures.

The centre branch is directly referenced from the Herbarium specimen *Juglans ailantifolia* collected by Frank Lomer. Although I worked from a photo of the Chinese walnut (*Juglans mandshurica*) specimen, I was inspired by his choice to flip one of the leaves to show its back, as well as its golden colour, both of which I feel contributed to the narrative I was building. The smaller pine branch was also from the Herbarium sheets, while the large branch was one I collected from a street tree.

The piece is reflective of my practice of collaging different elements together to arrive at a unity, rather than creating an image that is a fragment of a larger reality. They are multiplicities, a unity which is multiple, where the reality they create on the canvas is an uneasy and temporary one, with each of the elements remaining autonomous and connected to different territories of meaning.



The Elements

oil on canvas, 120 x 125 cm.

How do our surroundings influence us, and how do they change and infiltrate our personal sphere? How much of yourself is defined by your community, by friends, and other connections and associations? We all adapt to our circumstances and, in nature, this adaptation can be structural or behavioral. In this painting, I imagine human adaptation through the plants that surround me.

There are three branches, each of which comes from an environment that I still frequent. Represented are a pear branch (UBC Botanical Garden), an apple branch (my neighbours'), and a blueberry branch (UBC Farm). I chose these plants based on their differences, but also because they have all been heavily cultivated for common use, and they are painted in a manner that emphasizes these differences and similarities.

The branches are removed from their natural context and presented as individuals, to better discern their characteristics. This isolation was also inspired by the Herbarium sheets, which preserve individual specimens.

Despite the separation that exists between the branches, there are also efforts to align them and find common ground. There are attempts at co-existence or co-evolution. Each branch affects another by giving over a part of its structure. There is also an adaptation on the part of these elements to integrate more fully in the new "host", and traces of behavioral adaptation on the part of the blueberries.



Oracle

oil on cotton, 102 x 102 cm.

The painting as a portal to the artist is the subject of this piece. In classical antiquity, an oracle was a person or agent who was considered to communicate wise counsel, prophetic predictions, or precognition of the future inspired by the gods. As such, it was a form of divination. Frequently these messages took the form of riddles or cryptic declarations, whose meaning was open to interpretation and often mistaken. A painting also has the ability to engage someone in an experience outside of the ordinary and to suggest a message that has to be constructed in part by the viewer.

I have placed in this piece a large central linden branch with some chicory flowers sprouting spontaneously from it and a large horse chestnut branch with the spiky fruit falling from its top. The linden tree was considered to be an oracular plant because the heavy scent given off by its flowers purportedly induced visions and other oracular states. I hope to further evoke the idea of the oracle through the chicory's blue color, which I find otherworldly because its color is hard to pinpoint when you see it growing by the side of the road or in a field. The spiky fruit of the horse chestnut refers to the actuality that oracles did not necessarily impart good news and that their predictions could be open-ended or disguised bad news. Finally, the three branches that intertwine in the centre are a reference to the goddesses who would tend and transmit (as a musical instrument) the oracles.



Not Yet Weeping...

oil on cotton, 125 x 120 cm.

This painting brings together the willow and the quince, two trees that have had a long history of interaction with and significance to culture. This history and their opposing natures in this cultural history is what made me wish to put these two plants together. There are two types of willow branches in this piece, one the weeping willow and the other the native BC willow painted from the UBC Herbarium sheet. The quince branch and fruit come from the UBC Botanical Garden and Apple Festival. All combine to tell the story of love not yet lost by playing on the meanings these plants have had historically.

The great height and long, drooping branches of the weeping willow (*Salix babylonica*), have led to it being surrounded by various myths and legends. The thin, shimmering leaves look like tears, and since antiquity this tree has been considered a negative influence. According to a popular myth, it is said that the tree once stood erect and strong. However, the death of a pair of lovers so touched the heart of these trees that their branches drooped in misery and could never rise again.

The BC willow *Salix scouleriana* has a more upright shape and not the droopiness (sadness) of the more famous variety. Rather, as arranged by Frank Lomer, it has a beautiful, open, expansive manner. It interacts and allows itself to be influenced and interrupted by the quince branch.

Willow trees transpire huge quantities of water into the air, acting as conduits, and their branches have traditionally been used by water dowrsers to make Y-shaped divining rods. Although willows are associated with mysticism and witchcraft, they have had many different practical positive uses from aspirin to artist's charcoal.

The quince is native to the area of the Caucasus, just north of Iraq. Many believe that quince cultivation preceded even that of the apple (it was known to the ancient Akkadians) and that biblical references to the apple really refer to quinces. For the ancient Greeks the quince was sacred to Aphrodite and was considered the fruit of love. According to Plutarch, it was supposed to ward off bad influences. In the painting, this positive influence of the fruit counters the negative one of the weeping willow.











In the painting, an orchard with
various geographical trees and
fruit is depicted. The apple is
shown in various stages of ripeness and
color.

The illustration shows a branch
with small flowers or fruits.

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The blueberry is named from the Latin word *caeruleus*, meaning 'blue', and *myrica*, meaning 'myrtle', referring to the plant's appearance.

Blueberries are also known as *huckleberries*. There are many varieties of blueberries, and they are often used in jams, jellies, and other food products.







Botanica
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Solo Exhibitions and Projects

2014

Herbarium Project, Beaty Center for Biodiversity, UBC, Vancouver, May to September
Turning Landscapes, Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle, May

2013

Project with UBC Botanical Garden and Apple Festival, October
Cultural Biodiversity Projects, SACI Gallery, Florence, Italy, November

2012

New Paintings, Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle, USA
Working In Nature, project with UBC Farm and Beaty Centre for Biodiversity, UBC, see blog post 10/01/2012: www.beatymuseum.ubc.ca/blog
Morphology, Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, March

2011

A Concept Of Cloud, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, May 2009

Karen Yurkovich, Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle, October

2008

Vantage Art Projects, photographic edition, Worm Hole, Vancouver

Clear Skies, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, October

Last Garden, Galleria Della Pina, Pietrasanta, Italy, August

Magic Nature, SACI Gallery, Florence, March 2007

Daylight, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, November
Cool Fields, Agnes Bugera Gallery, Edmonton, May
The Forgotten Pears, episode of Recreating Eden, on Vision TV, shown in February 2007. I was included in the episode on Isabella Dalla Ragione, founder of Archeologia Arborea.

Cover for The Pear Orchard, by Joanne Weber, Hagios Press, Canada, 2007

2006

Fiori De Montagna, the dark side of Nature, Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento, Italy, December

Nature Walk, Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, November

Bio-D, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, July

Apple, Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle, July

2005

Post-Natural, Galleria Santa Marta, Milan, Italy
Meta, Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle

2004

Nature, Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento, Italy

I Never Promised You A Rose Garden, Part One, Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto

I Never Promised You A Rose Garden, Part Two, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver

Incontri, "Project for Juliet," N. 118, June 2004, pages 48 – 49

2003 and before

Oracle, Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle

Metamorphoses, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
The Same Story Again, Agnes Bugera Gallery
Love Knots, Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle
Change Of Season, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
Family Trees, Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle
A Single Line, Diane Farris Gallery, Vancouver
West Meets East, Linda Hodges Gallery
BC Natives And Immigrants, Richmond Art Gallery, Richmond, BC
Karen Yurkovich, Sala Giulia Gens, Rome
Gli Elementi, Sala del Grifo e del Leone, Palazzo dei Priori, Perugia

Curatorial Projects

2014

Within Alterity: A Collection, A Population, A Territory, co-curated with Daria Filardo, MAEC museum, Cortona, Italy, April to July

Selected Group Exhibitions

2011

Terra, Berchidda, Italy, curated by Gianella Demuro e Antonello Fresu, catalogue

2009

Artificio E Natura, GalleriaArmoryArte, Perugia, Italy, curated by Loredana Parmesani and Carla Berio, catalogue

2008

Il Vaso Di Pandora, GalleriaArmoryArte, Perugia, Italy, curated by Valerio Dehò, catalogue 2007

Artcover, Rocca dei Bentivoglio, Bazzano, Italy, curated by Valerio Dehò

SACI Faculty Exhibition, L' Albero Celeste Art Gallery, San Gimignano, Italy, December 2006 to February 2007

2006

Diverse Nature, with Isabella dalla Ragione, fp architetti, Milano, Italy

SACI Faculty Exhibition, August 2006 to May 2007, selected US Universities, catalogue

Artefiere, Bologna, February 2005

Vanitas, Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento, Italy, catalogue

Artisti Stranieri in Umbria, Corciano, Chiesa di San Francesco, curated by Massimo Duranti, catalogue

Artefiere, Bologna, February 2004

Vineart, Fair of contemporary and modern art, meditation of great wines, Messe fur Moderne und Zeitgenossische Kunst, Bolzano, Italy, November, catalogue

Ora, Galleria Spazio, Orvieto, Italy

Robinson, First International Prize for Contemporary Art, Passioni D'Umbria, Flash Art Museum, Trevi, Italy, curated by Maurizio Coccia, catalogue

Passione De Mela, various sites in Val di Non, Italy, curated by Vittoria Coen, catalogue

Artefiere, Bologna, February

2003

Pre-final, Miss Italia, San Benedetto del Trento.

Selected artist, artistic intervention on five gowns.

Transmission September 13, Rai 1.

Enter. Invito al futuro, Premio internazionale d'arte

Ermanno Casoli, sixth edition, Serra San Quirico,

Ancona, Galleria Spazia, Bologna, Barbara Behan

Gallery, London, January, 2004, curated by Valerio

Dehò

Floralis, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver

Hortus Conclusus, installation in the Arciducal Park,

Arco, Italy, curated by Giovanna Nicoletti

2002

DNArt, Biennale, Kunsthau Merano, Merano, Italy,

curated by Valerio Dehò, catalogue

Selected Collections

Bill Gates Foundation, Seattle

Unicredit Bank, Italy

Collection Lissa and Cy Wagner, Midland, Texas

Halle Berry, Hollywood

Erregerre Industries, Bergamo, Italy

Elica, Fabriano, Italy

Emaar Properties, Dubai, UAE

Intercept Pharmaceuticals, New York

Schweighofer Holzindustrie, Vienna, Austria

Collection Francesco Casoli, Serra San Quirico, Italy

Washington First Bank, Seattle

Nordstroms, Seattle

Dorothy Ames Design, Toronto

Deloitte Touche, Seattle

Port of Tacoma, Tacoma, Washington

Miller Thompson, Edmonton

Bio-Tech, Munich, Germany

Renaissance Wines, Vancouver & Calgary

Delta Hotels, Vancouver

Swedish Hospital, Seattle

Seymour Collection, Vancouver

Artemis Marketing Group, Vancouver

Alberta Foundation for the Arts

University of Alberta

Cook, Duke, Cox, Edmonton & Calgary

Shaw Cable, Calgary and Victoria

David Zacharko Architect, Vancouver

Zacharko Design Partnership, Vancouver

The Lazy Gourmet Restaurant, Vancouver

Kyle Loranger Design, Edmonton

Zymogenetics Corporation, Seattle.

Private collections in Europe, the UK, the US, and

Canada

For more information

www.karenyurkovich.com

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Picture Credits

Herbarium sheets courtesy of the UBC Herbarium

Beaty Biodiversity Museum, University of British Columbia, Vancouver BC, Canada

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