

JANUARY 13 – APRIL 16, 2023

THE WILLFUL PLOT

DERYA AKAY AND VIVIENNE BESSETTE
GABI DAO
DEREK JARMAN
CHARMIAN JOHNSON
GLENN LEWIS
MIKE MACDONALD
REHAB NAZZAL
DANA QADDAH

The Willful Plot brings together artists' practices to expand the notion of the garden as a site of tension between wild and cultivated, temporal and perpetual, public and private, sovereign and colonized. Here, the garden is considered by the artists not only as a delineated patch of earth, but as a story and a will to drive that story to complicate the way in which cultures and individuals see themselves in relation to ecology, sociality, belief and possibility. It is an opportunity to look at human relationships with land, flora, fauna and their interrelatedness. In its willfulness, the resistance garden is a counter-site, a heterotopia for alternative cultivation and potential transformation.

The complexities of resistance and "...willfulness as audacity, willfulness as standing against, willfulness as creativity" (borrowing from scholar Sara Ahmed's thinking in *Willful Subjects*) are articulated through works that use the garden as a site of cultural defiance and reclamation. From Mike MacDonald's quiet technological focus on threatened traditional medicines as part of the endangered cultural practices of Indigenous peoples to Derek Jarman's film shot in and around his visionary garden that was created in the face of his own mortality, these works activate possibility in the face of loss.

Countering notions of the garden as a site of nostalgia, Gabi Dao's film and collage work explores the garden as reparative, a site of decomposition and recomposition that can support and regenerate history. Rehab Nazzal's photography and film give agency to the wild plants that grow through ruined Palestinian villages and connect people to the land, even as parks and gardens are created as political claims. Dana Qaddah's photographic focus on a Beirut rooftop is a site of social and vegetal cultivation for specific bodies that would otherwise have limits on their gathering.

The politics of communality is embedded in Derya Akay and Vivienne Bessette's relational work with gardens as part of a larger resistance to development, outsourcing, individuation, speed and as a site to better entangle human and all other life. Gardens create links across time and cultures that connect the human desire to make sense of the earthly in relation to the cosmos. Over five decades, Glenn Lewis has photographed and created gardens in an investigation of paradisaical symbolism. The symbolic stages of the garden, an allegory of the cycles of life (and death), cannot be untangled from the climate crisis. Charmian Johnson's careful study of plant life through drawing offers



Derek Jarman, *The Garden* (production still), 1990, 35 mm film digital transfer. Courtesy of Basilisk Communications, Kino Lorber & Zeitgeist Films. Photo: Liam Daniel, Basilisk Communications Ltd.

another space of time in line with her subjects. If the garden is a site and a practice analogous to the studio, it exists within and beyond the logics of human time, holding its own agency, yielding non-linear narratives that give and take, fruit and compost, persist and disappear.

The Willful Plot is curated by Melanie O'Brian and made possible with the generous support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and our Belkin Curator's Forum members. The exhibition is part of the 2023 Capture Photography Festival Selected Exhibition Program.

Artists

Derya Akay (Turkish, b. 1988) is an interdisciplinary artist who works, learns and gardens on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Akay plays with the tension between preservation and decay, control and chance, trial and error. Their process-based artistic strategies allow them to embrace the realities of time and transformation on the organic materials they work with. Akay poeticizes the act of cooking, using it as a metaphor for their studio practice. Akay received a BFA from Emily Carr University in 2010. Collective plant, garden and food-based projects include Garden Don't Care and Looking at the Garden Fence. Recent exhibitions include Toronto Biennial of Art; The Wattis Institute, San Francisco; The Polygon Gallery, North Vancouver; Unit 17, Vancouver; and Vancouver Art Gallery.

Vivienne Bessette (b. 1982) is a queer artist of mixed settler and Michif heritage (Red River Treaty 1). They are based on the stolen and unceded territories of the x̱m̱əθḵ'əyem, Sḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh and səliwətaʔi Nations. Bessette incorporates drawing, painting, woodworking, sculpting, dying, writing, fermenting and building relationships with plants into their practice. They work in and out of the studio, the garden and the kitchen, developing sustainable and alternative modes of food production and utilizing unconventional materials. The strength of entangled and interdependent community is at the stomach of Bessette's process. Bessette holds a BFA from Simon Fraser University. They have been involved with multiple garden and food-based collectives, including Commons Garden at Sahalli Park Community Garden, Garden Don't Care, Looking at the Garden Fence, and the project *What artists bring to the table* for the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria with Derya Akay and Kurtis Wilson. Bessette was a Food Coordinator for *Slow Waves* Small Projects on Mayne Island. They have been published in *The Capilano Review* (*Pattern of Pears*, 2020 and *Organize Your Building* with the support of the Vancouver Tenants Union with the Belvedere Residents, 2018).

Gabi Dao (Canadian, b. 1991) is an artist and organizer currently based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Dao's research-based practice culminates in collage, sculpture, sound and moving image installations. They also generate olfactory experiences in both their installations and their small-batch perfume business, PPL'S PERFUME. Through non-linear conceptions of memory, time and truth, Dao confronts Western ocularcentrism and the rigid binarism of capitalism. Dao also engages with writing and community

building in her work. Dao is currently an MFA candidate at the Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam, and received a BFA from Emily Carr University. Dao was shortlisted for the Sobey Art Award (2021) and received the Portfolio Prize Award for Emerging Artists (2016). She has exhibited in galleries and artist-run spaces across Canada, Asia and Europe, including solo exhibitions at grunt gallery and Spare Room, Vancouver; as well as group exhibitions at the Vincom Centre for Contemporary Art, Hà Nội, Vietnam; Centre Clark, Montreal; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Kamias Triennale, Quezon City, Philippines; Nanaimo Art Gallery; Libby Leshgold Gallery at Emily Carr University, Vancouver; Burnaby Art Gallery; Vancouver Art Gallery; Audain Gallery at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver; Western Front, Vancouver; Artspeak, Vancouver; 221a, Vancouver.

Derek Jarman (English, 1942–1994) was an artist, filmmaker, gardener and activist who is considered a central figure of twentieth-century culture. A renowned director, cinematographer and set designer, he is best known for his avant-garde art films, many of which explored the lives of gay and bisexual historical figures, including *Caravaggio* (1986) and *Wittgenstein* (1993), despite the dominant conservatism of the time. Collaboration was essential to Jarman's practice. He worked with the Smiths, Pet Shop Boys and Bryan Ferry as an early maker of music videos, and helped launch the careers of Tilda Swinton and Sean Bean. After he was diagnosed with HIV in 1986, Jarman continued to elevate queer histories and experiences, giving a voice to the impact of the AIDS crisis on his community. Around this time, he also began tending his seaside garden at Prospect Cottage, his home in Dungeness, Kent. Gardening was a source of healing and happiness throughout the duration of his illness before he died of AIDS-related complications in 1994. His Prospect Cottage garden still remains today as a tribute to his life and work. During his life, Jarman exhibited across England, including at Edward Totah Gallery, London; ICA, London; and Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. His work has been widely exhibited posthumously, including a retrospective at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. Jarman wrote several books, including the autobiographical *Dancing Ledge* (1984) and two volumes of memoirs, *Modern Nature* (1992) and *At Your Own Risk* (1992). *Derek Jarman's Garden*, which documents the creation of his garden at Dungeness, was published in 1995.

Artists

Charmian Johnson (Canadian, 1939–2020) was an artist and educator who lived and worked in Vancouver. She studied ceramics under Glenn Lewis, and developed a distinct style within the Leachian tradition having spent a number of years at Bernard Leach's pottery studio in St. Ives where she catalogued and archived the Leach collection. Beginning in the 1970s, Johnson has been highly regarded across local and international ceramic communities. Throughout her lifetime, she developed a meticulous drawing practice that she kept largely to herself. Rendering botanical elements she encountered in her own garden as well as on her travels to Morocco, Turkey, Hawaii and France, Johnson developed her drawings over time, sometimes for months or even years. Johnson studied drawing, graphics and pottery at the University of British Columbia. She has had solo exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery and UBC Fine Arts Gallery (now the Belkin Gallery). Johnson has been featured in group exhibitions across Canada, including the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver; the Burnaby Art Gallery; the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; the Glenbow Museum, Calgary; the Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa; Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver; and in the 2004 exhibition *Thrown: Influences and Intentions of West Coast Ceramics* at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, which she co-curated.



Charmian Johnson, *Untitled (Fritillaria)*, n.d., ink and graphite on paper.
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, gift of the artist, 2019



Glenn Lewis, *Photographic Archive of Gardens Arranged in their Ambulatory Mythical Paradise Elements*, c. 1970-2021, photograph. Courtesy of the artist

Glenn Lewis (Canadian, b. 1935) is a contemporary conceptual artist based in Vancouver. Lewis became a central figure within Vancouver's prolific avant-garde art scene of the late 1960s. Initially trained in ceramics, his practice expanded to include photography, sculpture, performance and video, and is often grounded in collaborative projects or approaches. Lewis's work questions the dualities of the social and the natural, the conventional and the mythical, as well as the static and the transient. Over time he has become increasingly inspired by paradise myths, nature and topiary, which motivated his travels around the world photographing gardens. These interests intersect in his commitment to preserving rare and regional botany. Lewis received a degree from the Vancouver School of Art in 1958 (now Emily Carr University) and later a teaching degree from the University of British Columbia. He went on to study ceramics under artist and potter Bernard Leach at St. Ives in Cornwall, England from 1961 to 1963. Upon returning to Vancouver, Lewis became involved in numerous artists' collectives and artist-run centres, including Intermedia (1970) and the New Era Social Club (1968). In 1973, he co-founded the Western Front Society with Martin Bartlett, Mo van Nostrand, Kate Craig, Henry Greenhow, Eric Metcalfe, Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov. As an educator, arts administrator and arts programmer, Lewis has curated numerous exhibitions and programs, including the Performance Art Program at the Western Front (1977–79), the Exhibition Program at the Western Front (1986–87) and the Western Front Historical Exhibition at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Germany (1983). Lewis has served on numerous boards and councils, including the Vancouver Art Gallery Board of Directors and the Western Front Board of Directors. His work has been exhibited extensively across Canada and abroad.

Artists

Mike MacDonald (Mi'kmaq, 1941–2006) was a self-taught new media artist and gardener who lived in Nova Scotia. He linked his love for nature, Indigenous knowledge and storytelling with technology in his video and photography installations. He once said that "each of [his] shots is like a commercial for nature." One of MacDonald's most renowned living projects began in the early 1990s when he would embark on yearly road trips across Canada, planting butterfly gardens along the way. These gardens are tactile living examples of his devotion to and admiration of the environment. MacDonald's work has been shown internationally in solo exhibitions at venues including Sacred Circle Art Gallery, Seattle; Winnipeg Art Gallery; and Vancouver Art Gallery. His work has been included in group exhibitions at the Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris; Fujinomina, Mt. Fuji; Kamloops Art Gallery; Heard Museum, Phoenix and Edmonton Art Gallery. His work was recently featured at Vtape, Toronto, in partnership with the 2022 imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival where he had previously been awarded the first Aboriginal Achievement Award for New Media in 2000.

Rehab Nazzal is a Palestinian-born (b. 1961) multidisciplinary artist, activist and educator based in Vancouver. Her work interrogates the effects of settler colonialism on people, land and non-human life in Palestine. Nazzal blends experimental, conceptual and documentary strategies in her video, photography, sound and installation works. Her process relies heavily on research, critical thinking and community. Nazzal's community organizing work includes collaboration with various art collectives, activist groups and galleries in Toronto, London, ON,



Rehab Nazzal, *Lifta*, 2022, photograph. Courtesy the artist

Vancouver and Ottawa. Nazzal is currently a postdoctoral fellow at Concordia University. Nazzal was an assistant professor at Dar Al-Kalima University in Bethlehem, Palestine for three years, where she also served as Chair of the Contemporary Art and Interior Design Programs. She has lectured at Simon Fraser University, Western University and Ottawa School of Art. She holds a PhD in Art and Visual Culture from the University of Western Ontario, an MFA from Ryerson University, a BFA from the University of Ottawa and a BA (Economics) from Damascus University. Nazzal's work has been exhibited in Canada and internationally, including at the Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, Toronto; CONTACT Photography Festival, Toronto; Karsh-Masson Gallery, Ottawa; The Spanish Institute of Art; Encounters Film Festival, UK; the 22nd Sydney Biennale, Australia; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Foresight Gallery, Amman, Jordan; and Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre, Ramallah, Palestine. She was a resident at the 29e Symposium international d'art contemporain de Baie-Saint-Paul and AXENE07 Gallery in Quebec. She is the recipient of the Social Justice Award from Ryerson University and the Edmund and Isobel Ryan Visual Arts Award in Photography from the University of Ottawa.

Dana Qaddah (b. 1996 in Beirut, Lebanon) is an interdisciplinary artist and independent curator based on unceded Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish territory. With a practice which forefronts themes of Arab futurism and storytelling, Qaddah uses archives of personal and itinerant cultural knowledge in installation, sculpture, photography and video works, while reflecting on generational displacement and being abstracted from the destruction of one's own sense of self and place. Qaddah holds a BFA from Emily Carr University, and has presented work in both solo and group exhibitions at Unit 17, Vancouver. Other solo shows were held at Massy Arts Society for Capture Photography Festival, Vancouver and Glass Corner at Libby Leshgold Gallery at Emily Carr University, Vancouver. Qaddah will be included in an upcoming group exhibition at Pendulum Gallery for Capture Photography Festival, Vancouver (2023). Notable residencies include Plug-In ICA's Summer Institute II; BUSH Gallery, and a two-month production residency at VIVO Media Arts Centre. Recent curatorial projects include *Upper Side of the Sky* by Jawa El Khash hosted by Western Front, Vancouver, as part of *Recollective: Vancouver Independent Archives Week* and *No Man's Land* by Razan Al Salah hosted by C Magazine.

List of Works

Derya Akay and Vivienne Bessette

All works courtesy of the artists

Freon, 2015-ongoing
fridge installation
dimensions variable

bread / bathhouse <> subway <> numbers, 2022
mixed-media framed drawings
47.0 x 47.3 x 10.8 cm

parable of two cups / which strawberry are you?, 2022
mixed-media framed drawings
43.0 x 47.3 x 8.5 cm

a relationship to the body / pizza, 2022
mixed-media framed drawings
50.0 x 40.9 x 5.6 cm

"Snail" / Dino-treasure, 2022
mixed-media framed drawing
45.6 x 47.3 x 15.7 cm

Gabi Dao

The Protagonists, 2018
video, 8 m 9 s
Courtesy of the artist and VIVO Media Arts Centre

Tear Possibility 2, 3, 4 and 5, 2021
4 collages on paper
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Unit 17

Tear Possibility 6 and 7, 2021
2 collages on paper
dimensions variable
City of Burnaby Permanent Art Collection

antigen, allergen, molecule, wing, 2022
scent
Courtesy of the artist and Unit 17

Derek Jarman

The Garden, 1990
Super 8 film transferred to 35 mm film, transferred to digital, 1 h 32 m
Courtesy of Basilisk Communications, Kino Lorber and Zeitgeist Films

Screening times:
10:27 am
12:00 pm
1:33 pm
3:06 pm
4:39 pm

Charmian Johnson

All works collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery

Anthurium andraeanum, 1988
ink on paper
56.3 x 75.1 cm
Gift of the artist, 2019

Anthurium andraeanum sketches, c. 1988
4 ink, graphite and correction fluid on paper drawings
dimensions variable
Charmian Johnson fonds

Untitled, c. 1990s
ink on paper
69.8 x 49 cm
Purchased with support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Morris and Helen Belkin Foundation, 2018

Egyptian Onion Study, 2017
ink on paper
75.3 x 56.1 cm
Purchased with support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Morris and Helen Belkin Foundation, 2018

Untitled, unknown date
ink on paper
77.0 x 61.4 cm
Gift of the artist, 2019

List of Works

Glenn Lewis

Looking for Paradise, c. 1970–2021
photographs, publications, prints and drawings
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and collection of the Morris
and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Glenn Lewis fonds

*Photographic Archive of Gardens Arranged in
their Ambulatory Mythical Paradise Elements*,
c. 1970–2021
4,062 digitized and digital photographs in three
sections
Courtesy of the artist

Tablet 1: *Bewilderness, Gateway, Utopiary*
Tablet 2: *Pathways, Courtyards, Waterways*
Tablet 3: *Trees/Groves, Sacred Mount, Grotto*

Mike MacDonald

Secret Garden, 1993
16-channel video installation
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, purchased
with support from the Vancouver Art Gallery
Acquisitions Fund and the Canada Council for the
Arts Acquisition Assistance program, 1996

Rehab Nazzal

Both works courtesy of the artist

Canada Park, 2015
video, 11 m 50 s

We, the Wild Plants and Fruit Trees, 2022
59 inkjet prints on paper
dimensions variable

Dana Qaddah

Sidani Roof, 2022
25 inkjet prints on paper
19.6 x 29.8 cm each
Courtesy of the artist

At the Walter C. Koerner Library, 1958 Main Mall

Gabi Dao

mineral still, 2022
vinyl
Courtesy of the artist

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For exhibition tours for groups and classes, contact Naomi Sawada at naomi.sawada@ubc.ca or 604 822 3640

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

For details, visit belkin.ubc.ca

Opening Reception

Thursday, January 12 from 6 to 8 pm

Lecture Series: what a seed does; or tending to paradise, however you see it

Wednesday, February 1 at 1 pm with Jane Wolff

Wednesday, March 1 at 4 pm with Desirée Valadares

Wednesday, March 29 at 1 pm with Sara Jacobs

Tea with Glenn Lewis

Sunday, February 5 at 2 pm

Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-thon

Wednesday, March 8 from 11 am to 2 pm

Concert at the Belkin with UBC Contemporary Players

Wednesday, April 12 at 2 pm



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