

# NEAR DWELLERS

THE TREE MUSEUM & STREET ROAD    AUGUST 2023 – SEPTEMBER 2024

## FAWN DAPHNE PLESSNER AND SUSANNA KAMON

### NEAR DWELLERS AS LEGAL BEINGS

OCTOBER 13 – DECEMBER 30, 2023

#### 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



# **FAWN DAPHNE PLESSNER AND SUSANNA KAMON**

## **NEAR DWELLERS AS LEGAL BEINGS**

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.





*Figure 1*  
*Eastern coyote in rain at Beaver Pond*  
Susanna Kamon  
Trail camera photographs, 2023

This exhibition takes its name from the recent book by Maneesha Deckha, *Animals as Legal Beings: Contesting Anthropocentric Legal Orders*, and draws on her insights in *Animal Law*. The show is also inspired by the burgeoning literature and revitalization of the practice of Indigenous Laws within Canada and the USA. Both branches of scholarship attest to animals as political agents in-their-own-right. Deckha proposes a new legal ontology with animal subjectivity at the foundation of a necessary rescripting of (common) law. In the case of Indigenous Laws, animals are understood not only as sentient, emotional beings, but as self-organised communities that not only make their – and indeed, *our* – world (literally creating the conditions for survival) but are afforded a political and legal status that recognizes nuanced protocols – laws – that are shaped by, and mediate, interspecies relationships between individuals, kin groups, and communities. The work in this exhibition aims to explore what it is for animals to be regarded as political agents and as legal beings.

In the growing awareness of Indigenous Laws, we learn two important facts: first, animals and human beings are kin. This conceptualisation establishes that all beings are bodily related. Animals (and indeed, plants) are therefore understood and referred to as relatives. Second, all animals and plants are seen as constituting their own nations (often,

specifically called the Deer Nation, or the Bear Nation and so forth). The momentousness of this perspective is not only in its conceptual turn away from privileging human interests and needs over all other forms of life, but also in its positioning of animals (and other beings) at the center of governance. Humans are not regarded as the only actors in this configuration of politics, nor in the management of a community's affairs. For the reason that kinship and nationhood is at the heart of Indigenous Laws, political membership is clearly expanded to include more-than-human beings. We see this enacted in numerous ways but one such example is in the making of interspecies treaties. Indigenous Peoples have not only historically held treaties with animal nations but are currently reviving the practice, such as in the resurgence of the Buffalo Treaty brought about by Indigenous Peoples whose traditional (including unceded) territories straddle the US and Canadian border. The stated purpose of the Treaty is:

*"To honor, recognize, and revitalize the time immemorial relationship we have with BUFFALO, it is the collective intention of WE, the undersigned NATIONS, to welcome BUFFALO to once again live among us as CREATOR intended by doing everything within our means so WE and BUFFALO will once again live together to nurture each other culturally and spiritually. It is our collective intention to recognize BUFFALO as a wild free-ranging animal and as an important part of the ecological system; to provide a safe space and environment across*



*Figures 2 and 3*

*Top: Antlered doe and fawns, still from videographic footage, Susanna Kamon*

*Bottom: Sniff, still from video footage, Fawn Daphne Plessner*

From film room installation, with trail camera footage by Kamon interspersed with Fawn Daphne Plessner's *Deer Tour*, 2023 ([www.tree-museum.com/deer-tour](http://www.tree-museum.com/deer-tour))

*our historic homelands, on both sides of the United States and the Canadian border, so together WE can have our brother, the BUFFALO, lead us in nurturing our land, plants and other animals to once again realize THE BUFFALO WAYS for our future generations".\**

Governance here is clearly centered on "The Buffalo Ways" and encloses humans in a wider matrix of political memberships, social obligations and ethical responsibilities. Humans are required to not only respect the autonomy and agency of other beings but are also under an obligation not to harm their life ways.

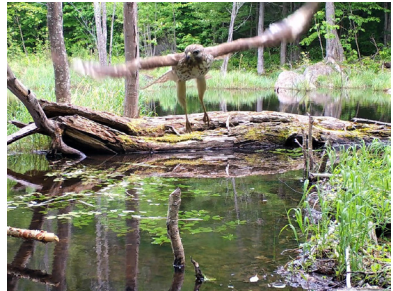
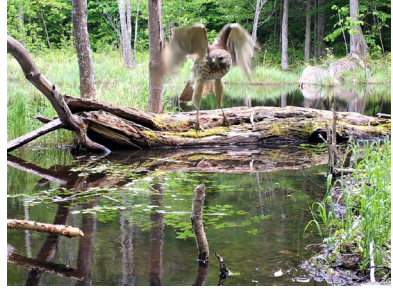
Within this frame of reference, here visitors are invited to engage with artworks that introduce three facets of interspecies relationships: first, visitors are presented with a selection of storied relationships with (wild) animals that illustrate our bodily connection to other beings, secondly, images and stories also aim to make palpable the reality of self-governing animal communities, and thirdly, the show raises questions about legally sanctioned violence toward animals.

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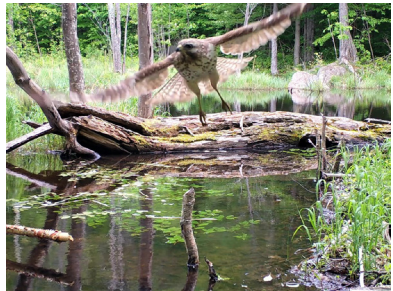
*\* [www.buffalotreaty.com](http://www.buffalotreaty.com). Signatories to the Buffalo Treaty include the Blackfeet Nation, Blood Tribe, Siksika Nation, Piikani Nation, The Assiniboine and Gros Ventre Tribes of Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, The Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Fort Peck Indian Reservation, The Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Indian Reservation, Tsuut'ina Nation, and many others*

In the film room (figures 2 and 3), excerpts from Fawn Daphne Plessner's audio art project, *Deer Tour*, are interspersed with the videographic footage of wild animals by Susanna Kamon. The opportunity to closely scrutinize animals such as deer, coyotes, bears and many other animals as they traverse their terrain and negotiate their presence with other critters is deeply compelling and inspiring. In Kamon's footage we witness animals following and criss-crossing trails, navigating the terrain through their acute ability to detect the traces of scents and sounds. We see the complexity of interspecies communication, with animals signalling their presence by urinating and so forth. Deer and coyotes leap into the air, in chase. We are also treated to what might possibly be a rare occurrence, an antlered doe grazing with her fawns. The aesthetics of Kamon's film work is raw and vivid. We hear the sounds of hooves and paws and claws hit the ground as animals walk or run through grasses, bushes and ponds. We hear birds singing, bears and coyotes panting, grunting and howling. Time codes at the bottom of the screen mark the moment of the film capture and position the viewer as if in a liminal space between celebrant and tracker. The tension created between the seductive imagery and timestamps invites contemplation on being human; of one's connection to other animals but also of the human capacity to regard other beings as





*Figure 4*  
*Black bear cub following its mother*  
Susanna Kamon  
Trail camera photographs, 2023



*Figure 5*  
*Red-tailed hawk defying gravity*  
Susanna Kamon  
Trail camera photographs, 2023



objects. However, Kamon's footage situates us within the quotidian moments of animal lives and instead is an affirmation of the "alterity, expression and relationality" (Deckha, 2021) of all beings.

Interspersed with Kamon's footage, we hear the voice of Plessner relating an anecdote about a moment of communion with a small herd of deer whom she lives alongside on their island home in British Columbia, Canada. Since 2016, a deep bond has formed between Plessner and a number of remarkable individuals, especially with one stag in particular, called SI,ÁM (pronounced see-am).

Two more short anecdotes tell of the darker side of deer life on the island, with one doe being chased and killed by a dog. The Deer Tour also presents two traditional Indigenous stories: one told by Earl Claxton Jr. (WSÁNEĆ First Nation) about SMIET (pronounced Sm-eye-eth): this describes the transformation of a (hu)man into a deer. This WSÁNEĆ story importantly highlights the making of a human and animal kinship group. The second story is called *How Disease Came to the People* and is told by Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee Nation). Woven together in this Cherokee story is a description of animal (political) deliberation that makes apparent the (very real) consequences of a human and animal treaty, broken through willful acts of harm by humans toward a Deer Nation.

Harming other beings and negotiating and regulating violence is, of course, at the heart of how all animals, including humans, conduct themselves politically through systems of laws. Currently, within our colonial legal imaginary animals are classified as property – a conception derived from English Common Law that pervades the workings of the capitalist state. The designation of animals as property also stages an elaborate conceit: it distances humans from the moral dilemma that human acts of killing present. That is, the life of an animal can be extinguished (via farming or hunting etc.) without one being held responsible for taking its life. Such a status not only sanctions, but also sustains, the privileging of human interests over those of all other beings, regardless of the pain and suffering that animals endure for human benefit (and grotesquely so in the case of industrial farming practices) (Deckha, 2021).

Also on view are groupings of images that together trouble human acts of violence toward animals, here specifically wild animals. The first grouping (fig. 6) is a reworked page from a 1970s magazine published by the Province of British Columbia's Tourism Board featuring a 10-year-old Plessner visiting the then new Vancouver Game Farm, alongside a story of her encounter with a Llama, who spit on her. What is alluded to here is twofold: first, the resilience of



Figure 6 – Installation view with First grouping at left along shelf, Fawn Daphne Plessner Magazine page of Plessner at age 10 at Vancouver Game Farm, with llama; Quote from Melanie Challenger's book, *How to be Animal*; quote of the Greek philosopher; and Dicaearchus, 4th century BC.



Figure 7 – Second grouping, Fawn Daphne Plessner left to right: A trophy hunting story of a hybrid Polar-Grizzly bear; Reproduction of an 1830s sentimental Americana print celebrating hunting.



**Figure 8 – Third grouping, Fawn Daphne Plessner**, left to right: Newspaper clipping of elderly Chechen woman leaning over her dead cow during Chechen War, 1999; Excerpts from online news articles listing numbers of animals killed in Ukraine War, 2023; and SI,AM the stag preparing to sleep in Plessner's living room, 2023.

the animal despite its captivity, and, secondly, the application of farm management techniques that inform the zoo's containment of wild animals. Next to this image is a poster with a quote from Melanie Challenger's book, *How to Be Animal: A New History of What it Means to be Human*, that eloquently interrogates the widespread problem that human beings struggle to see themselves as animals. The scripting of humans as possessing superior minds is neatly critiqued. Next to the Challenger poster is a quote by Dicaearchus, a contemporary of Cicero, who denies the existence of minds entirely, including human minds, and instead suggests that all animals, all consciousness, is wholly determined by our sensory perception.

Collectively, these pieces illustrate and trouble the presumption of human exceptionalism.

In the second cluster (fig. 7), the theme is hunting. One poster is a short excerpt from a book by Laurence C. Smith titled *The World in 2050*, and relates the story of an American businessman, who intended to kill a polar bear, but instead downed the first known hybrid polar-grizzly bear. Accompanying this poster is a reproduction of a popular, sentimental, Americana illustration from the 1830s by Currier & Ives, showing a group of men gathered at a lakeshore, surrounded by forest and happily carrying the carcasses of dead wild animals. The illustration is oddly titled *Life in the Woods*, but subtitled "a



**Figure 9 – Eastern Ccyote playing with deer remnant**  
Susanna Kamon  
Trail camera photographs, 2023





**Figure 10 – White-tailed deer in flight**  
Susanna Kamon  
Trail camera photographs, 2023

settler paradox" by Plessner. Together these images draw out and trouble the tension between the excesses of killing, of pridefulness and trophied displays, with practical knowledge acquired through the act of hunting.

The third grouping's theme (fig. 8) raises the issue of the invisibility of the mass deaths of animals that occur when arsenals are unleashed during wars. A newspaper clipping from 1999 shows an elderly woman stooped over her dead cow, killed by Russians during the Chechen War. This sits alongside a long list of animals killed by Russian bombings in Ukraine – a list that shifts from numbered accounts to short narratives of terrible incidents, all collected from online newspapers.

Closing off the groupings is a double image of Plessner's much loved near dweller SI,ÁM, who decided to find a quiet spot in her living room to sleep (fig. 6), included as a reminder of how wild animals, when they trust us, reveal aspects of themselves that disrupt the assumption that their lives are merely primal and rudimentary.

Flanking the printed matter are sets of still photographs from Kamon's videos (figs. 1-5, 9, 10, and inner covers). We see a deer leaping, a bear and cub ambling, a hawk in flight, a coyote running and night hunting. These images not only invite close scrutiny but also tug at our emotions in reminding us of the beauty and grace of all our animal "relatives."

**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.

Five public talks will 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 details, please visit [www.street-road.org/near-dwellers](http://www.street-road.org/near-dwellers)

For the Near Dwellers as Legal Beings public lecture, guest speaker and Animal Law scholar Maneesha Deckha, joins Fawn Daphne Plessner and Susanna Kamon. The panelists will share their reflections on how their work reveals animals as political agents in-their-own-right, with Deckha speaking more fulsomely about her work in the field of Animal Law that posits alternatives to Common Law or rights-based anthropocentric legal orders.

For connection details, 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](http://www.streetroad.org/near-dwellers)

To listen to the entire Deer Tour, visit:  
[www.tree-museum.com/deer-tour](http://www.tree-museum.com/deer-tour)

For Susanna Kamon's work and videography, visit:  
[www.instagram.com/beyondthesafari](http://www.instagram.com/beyondthesafari)



## 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](http://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

[hello@streetroad.org](mailto:hello@streetroad.org)  
[www.streetroad.org](http://www.streetroad.org)







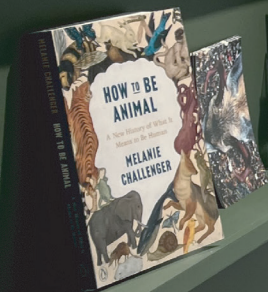
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AUGUST 2023 – SEPTEMBER 2024 THE TREE MUSEUM & STREET ROAD



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**NEAR DWELLERS AND THE STRAITS OF MALAYA**  
SARAH LE QUANG-SAIING  
AUGUST 4 – SEPTEMBER 2023

**NEAR DWELLERS AS LEGAL BEINGS**  
FRANK GAMPER, JESSICA AND JOE SERRANO, HANNAH  
OCTOBER 17 – DECEMBER 2023

**NEAR DWELLERS AS CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS**  
RUTH K. BUNGE AND JACQUELINE WINTER  
FEBRUARY 9 – JUNE 10, 2024

**NEAR DWELLERS AS NEIGHBORS**  
JESSE GARDNER AND JESSICA WINTER  
MAY 7 – JULY 10, 2024

**NEAR DWELLERS: HIMALAYAS & CONTEMPORARY**  
JESSE GARDNER AND JESSICA WINTER  
AUGUST 9 – SEPTEMBER 2024

BY YOU, OUR COMMUNITY, WITH US, NEAR DWELLERS

