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Ecocene Arts



Sentient Conversations

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Sentient Conversations

by prOphecy sun



About the Artist

prOphecy sun (PhD) is an interdisciplinary performance artist, queer, movement, video, sound maker, and mother of three. Her practice celebrates both conscious and unconscious moments and the vulnerable spaces of the in-between in which art, performance, and life overlap. Her recent research has focused on ecofeminist perspectives, co-composing with voice, objects, surveillance technologies, and site-specific engagements along the Columbia Basin region and beyond. She is the Arts Editor for *Ecocene: Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities* and sessional faculty at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. She performs and regularly exhibits in local, national, and international settings, music festivals, conferences, and galleries and has authored several peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and journal publications on sound design, installation, performance, and domestic spheres.

Sentient Conversations

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There are more life forms in a handful of forest soil than there are people on the planet. A mere teaspoonful contains many miles of fungal filaments. All these work the soil, transform it, and make it so valuable for the trees.
—Peter Wohlleben

We live in a world of reckoning. In history, in politics, in culture, oppressive paradigms are being overturned and new perspectives are unfolding. One significant site(s) of reckoning are the modern, imperial, and colonial constructions of the environment that have served to silence and limit the voice of the non-human world, and our collective understanding of it. In the spirit of this moment, I begin this conversation with a powerful reconsideration: everything is sentient—soil, plants, algae, fungi, trees, birds, worms, rocks, and more. Sophisticated and rootbound, trees cooperate with their kin and communicate their needs. Remembering past events, perceiving and mounting defenses from impending droughts and fire seasons, trees have inseparable bonds with others (Simard 2021). Similarly, lichen are mutually arranged in complex relations to help one another survive and thrive, and provide complex nutrients to the ground and tree lined canopies of Douglas fir, cedars, and spruce (Wohlleben 2016). Michael Hathaway and Willoughby Arévalo articulate how mycorrhizal networks communicate, make decisions, and learn ways to move, coordinate, and tell other fungi about lurking dangers and other events (2023). Sentient and formidable, mycelium feed one another through branched structures and tubes, releasing and responding to chemical signals using amino acids (Hathaway and Arévalo 2023).

The sixth installment of *Ecocene Arts* takes a cue from these vast and interconnected structures and presents three pieces from international artists and researchers—*Forest Encounters* (2023), *The Novels of Elsgüer: Counter Narratives and Ecosystems of Corporeal and Virtual Displacement* (2022), and *Monuments and Megachile: Lessons from the Insect Graveyard* (2022). Like the robust networks that trees and

mycelium convene, the contributions question how to tread and converse with more-than-human environments and species to reconsider ways of thinking and living with roots, insects, bacteria and other species.

In the first piece, **Leah Weinstein** embraces practices of care, *flâneuse* sensibilities, and speculative approaches to assemblage, all the while wrangling with her innate connection with forests.¹ Through performative actions of hanging readymade chairs from arboreous trees, building nomadic fabric structures, or sewing safety blankets for animals, she draws attention to our shared experiences and the fleeting triangulations of the everyday. Like the mycelium and mother trees that nurture everything below and beyond their reach, Weinstein tends to life forms, big and small, through meditative acts of care.

The second piece by **Laura Acosta and Santiago Tavera** offers a decolonial perspective on the vitality of systems, presenting the body as a polymorphic form, continually in flux. The artwork challenges notions of how relationships are formed and felt, how environmental elements impact us, and how we leave traces in it. The immersive series meshes audio-visual, sculptural, and expanded approaches as a way to grapple with the multiplicity of viewpoints inherent in displacement.

Cole Swanson's piece is an ode to the insect apocalypse and brings the view up close. The immersive mixed media installations challenge us to imagine beyond our limbs, eyes, and ears and embark on an entomological arrangement of reclaimed, extracted, displayed, and archived fallen winged bee specimens. Throughout the work, Swanson reminds us of the implications of existing in liminal and entangled undefined spaces.

Collectively, the pieces remind us of the inherently delicate and collaborative ways we coexist within past and present temporalities. Considering the vital and lively qualities embedded in winged, tubal, treed, plant systems and fossil materials, the artworks invite us to consider living and dead relations. Each articulates how worldmaking begins with possibility, adaptation, and interspecies union.

Notes

¹ I mention this term in relation to the idea of movement and discovery. I see the *flâneuse* as a roaming, re-shaping female figure that carries with them much potential for breathing new life into the everyday (De Certeau 1984, 92; Braidotti 2006, 197).

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