



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Beaty Biodiversity Museum

2212 Main Mall  
Vancouver B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4  
[beatymuseum.ubc.ca](http://beatymuseum.ubc.ca)

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## The Herbarium Project – Botanical Subjects Take on New Meaning

Vancouver, BC – It's not often parallels can be drawn between a book about food and an art installation, but this is one way artist Karen Yurkovich has spoken about the ideas around her latest body of work – The Herbarium Project, an exhibition at UBC's Beaty Biodiversity Museum (BBM). The exhibition opens May 16 and runs until August 24, 2014. It features six large-scale oil paintings of plant specimens from the Herbarium Collection at the Beaty Biodiversity Museum. This research collection is reinterpreted by Yurkovich who uses the symbolism, mythology, and history associated with these plants to tell stories.

Food writer Michael Pollan describes how different cultures view food and the way it impacts their health. Those who see food as a way to maintain health are, paradoxically, unhealthy, while cultures that view food as a vehicle for social interaction and enjoyment are surprisingly healthier.

According to Yurkovich we have a similar relationship with nature – we see nature as a resource but surprisingly few people engage in stewardship or sustainable practices to maintain that resource. Yurkovich's paintings encourage us to move beyond a functional relationship with nature and to build a stronger emotional bond – to view nature not solely in terms of its economic value, but also as a source of cultural, emotional and aesthetic values.

"Yurkovich's approach to this project is exciting," says Hana Dethlefsen, the museum's Exhibits Manager, "because it really speaks to the reason we make it a priority to exhibit biodiversity-related artwork in a research facility. Above and beyond what we do to communicate the research that is conducted at the BBM, our art exhibitions help to build personal relationships and emotional connections that we hope will encourage our visitors to value biodiversity and take responsible action for its protection."

Yurkovich explains that her paintings are "Unlike traditional still life where the objects are reflective of a world, and passive in that they remain in that world, my plants become protagonists creating a new 'story' and history for themselves."

Alongside the paintings are some of the original Herbarium specimens, captivating in their own right, that inspired the paintings as well as the artist's research materials, providing a unique insight into Yurkovich's artistic process.

For more information on The Herbarium Project please visit [www.beatymuseum.ubc.ca/the-herbarium-project](http://www.beatymuseum.ubc.ca/the-herbarium-project).



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### **About the Artist**

Karen Yurkovich is a Canadian artist working between Vancouver and Florence, Italy. She centres her practice on nature and the ways in which it manifests in the thoughts and concepts within society and culture. Her work explores themes such as native and immigrant plants, bonsai, classical still lifes of the 16th century, GMOs, ancient cultivars and cultivation, the use of plants in medicine and culinary practices, issues of biodiversity, and the symbolic role of plants within different cultures.

Yurkovich's work has been shown extensively and can be found in both private and public collections including the Bill Gates Foundation, Unicredit Bank, Italy, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and the Cy and Lissa Wagner Collection, Texas.

She currently directs and teaches in the MFA program at Studio Art Centers International, Florence and continues to teach at Emily Carr University in Vancouver.

### **About the Beaty Biodiversity Museum**

The Beaty Biodiversity Museum is at 2212 Main Mall on the University of British Columbia campus. Dubbed the "Best Collection of Weird Things in Drawers," this natural history museum exhibits more than 2 million specimens divided among six collections: the Cowan Tetrapod Collection, The Herbarium, the Spencer Entomological Collection, the Fish Collection, the Marine Invertebrate Collection and the Fossil Collection. The Museum is home to Canada's largest blue whale skeleton, which is suspended in the two-story glass atrium.

<http://www.beatymuseum.ubc.ca>

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Not Yet Weeping...  
2013, oil on cotton



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Elements  
2013, oil on cotton



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Company You Keep  
2013, oil on cotton