



Installation of *Look, it's daybreak, dear, time to sing*. Photo courtesy of Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts.

The exhibition was created with the support of the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts and organized by Sylvie Fortin, Bemis Center Curator-in-Residence 2019-2021. The artists and the curator also acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec.

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Related Programs:

**Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens
A Discussion with Curator Sylvie Fortin
Thursday, August 19
5:30 P.M. Reception | 6:00 P.M. Program**

**Tallgrass Artist Residency Talk
Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens
Saturday, August 28
1:30 P.M.
Community Church Building
Matfield Green, KS**

**Family Fun Day
Around the Neighborhood:
Feathers, Blocks, and Tweets
Saturday, September 25
1-3 P.M.**

**Citizen Science in Action
Dr. Alice Boyle
Tuesday, October 26
3:30 P.M. | Reception to follow**

Mon.-Sat. 11 am-5 pm | Closed Sundays, University & Major Holidays | Social Media: @ulrichmuseum
ulrich.wichita.edu | Free Admission | 316.978.3664 | 1845 Fairmount | Wichita, KS | 67260-0046

Richard Ibgby & Marilou Lemmens

Look, it's daybreak, dear, time to sing



August 19-December 4, 2021



Ulrich Museum of Art
Wichita State University



Production still from *Cleaning the Atlantic Puffins, Tufted Puffins, and Common Murres' Exhibit*, 2019, HD video with sound, 8:31 minutes (looped), from the series *The Violence of Care*, courtesy of the artists.

Birds and humans have been companions since time immemorial. Birds' flight, feathers, and songs traverse humanity's artistic and cultural productions, echoing the myriad ways in which our winged comrades riddle our dreams, capture our projections, and fan our desires. But what are we to them? Today, with climate change on everyone's mind, our interrelatedness spurs us to address our shared fate with greater attention and care.

Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens's exhibition *Look, it's daybreak, dear, time to sing* was researched and produced during a residency at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, where it was shown in 2019–2020. The project's initial inquiry into birdsong quickly became an exploration of shared territories. The fast decline of grassland bird communities led the artists to examine recent changes in farming practices and other non-sustainable, productivist relationships to land and soil. In the process, they began to look north to Canada, the neighbor with which the U.S. shares many avian species, agricultural trade agreements, and conservation initiatives. Highlighting the ties that bind humans and birds, this exhibition adopts a more-than-human viewpoint to reveal sites of hope and friction. For its presentation at the Ulrich Museum of Art, the project has been reconfigured and expanded to include the video *Herber, désherber (Planting, Unplanting)* and the sculpture *Community Toolshed for the Birds*.

Herber, désherber (Planting, Unplanting) welcomes visitors to the Polk/Wilson Gallery with a woman's skillful bare hands digging holes, placing seeds and small plants in the ground, and ruthlessly ripping them. While her agricultural labor is committed to the long-term sustenance of soil and its biodiversity, her crops remain human-centric and her care is tinged with violence: she annihilates the plants that do not benefit humans. Her gestures connect the living and nonliving, the human and nonhuman, calling on us to think in circles instead of along the lines of "progress" and "production."

Display tables host a profusion of small wooden sculptures, offering multiple paths through the exhibition. The series entitled *Futures* presents colorful geometric constructions that materialize graphical representations of the economic, financial, and ecological processes at play in North American food and biofuel production. *The Survival Editions of Popular Wooden Games* series evokes old-time games while raising both the stakes and the odds against players. Its sculptures make abstraction sensate: they turn abstract knowledge into concrete objects highlighting the challenges of multispecies cohabitation in an age of ecological collapse and mass extinction. While the odds are stacked against the possibility of survival, the game itself is precarious: a sleight of hands could dismantle and re-compose it, just like the sculptures. The works' materialist move carves possibilities of refusal and reconfiguration.



Production still from *Banding and Releasing Young Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes in Carden Field Site*, 2019, HD video with sound, 24:25 minutes, from the series *The Violence of Care*, courtesy of the artists.

A small internally-lit wooden structure entitled *Community Toolshed for the Birds* contains tools that birds have been observed to use and fabricate for various purposes, from foraging to play. While humans have long believed they are the only animals to employ instruments—even heralding tool use as proof of humankind's distinctive intelligence—it is quite common for animals to use them and to share this knowledge over generations. Designed to function as a community "library," *Community Toolshed for the Birds* contributes whimsically yet practically to the improvement of interspecies cohabitation.

Video images mingle with the sculptures in the exhibition space, showing human practices that aim to create the conditions for avian lives to be sustained, or better yet, to thrive. Connecting the zoo, the field station, the conservation center, and the backyard, the video series *The Violence of Care* makes immediate and explicit the entanglement of avian and human ecologies. Care is here explored across a broad spectrum including preemption, reparation, and palliation. In this series, care is measured, imagined, and at times wondrously quixotic, but never idealized.

Counting Birds for Five-minutes takes us to a nature reserve where two biologists perform a five-minute bird count (5MBC). Widely used to monitor bird populations, this easy and inexpensive method enables researchers to infer bird populations from field samples collected by scientists and citizens.

Two videos shift our attention to the underside of the zoological spectacle, where care is paid employment and invisible labor of love. In *Cleaning the Atlantic Puffins, Tufted Puffins, and Common Murres' Exhibit*, a keeper diligently maintains the titular exhibit. As the birds dive, swim, and move in and out of their nests, he meticulously scrubs the manufactured landscape. From the other side of the glass, the camera captures both the birds living their lives on display and the human care and dedication required to make their lives visible. In *Feeding Birds in the Aviary*, another keeper brings food to the inhabitants of an expansive outdoor aviary, revealing its carefully designed landscape and the labor invested in caring for captive birds. While the aviary is designed to house an uncommon gathering of cohabiting bird species, uninvited guests, mainly European starlings, have also made it their home.

By contrast, *Feeding Cottonball* presents an intimate domestic encounter. Cottonball has stopped laying eggs, thanks to the venerable age that also prevents her from walking to the chicken house's feeder to feast with her fellow hens. Her human companion now carries Cottonball outside to hand-feed her.



Production still from *Herber, désherber (Planting, Unplanting)*, 2020, HD video with sound, 17 minutes, realized with the support of the Grantham Foundation for the Arts and the Environment, courtesy of the artists.

Three videos filmed in Eastern Canada focus on architectures and practices of care that aim for avian rehabilitation and release into compromised environments. They also acknowledge the continental—and planetary—scale of our entanglements. In *Rehabilitating Juvenile Crows*, eight young American crows fly in a rehabilitation structure. Different circumstances have led them there, including a cat attack, a broken wing, and long-term captivity. With space to fly around, play, and be exposed to the natural elements, rehabilitation readies them for their release.

The Loggerhead Shrike, a species once common in pastures and grasslands across Eastern Canada, is now critically endangered, with roughly a dozen wild breeding pairs remaining in the plains of Carden. Every summer, cohorts of young Loggerhead Shrikes bred in captivity in Canada and the U.S. are transferred to the Carden Alvar before they are released to strengthen the wild Loggerhead Shrike population. In the video entitled *Banding and Releasing Young Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes in the Carden Alvar*, a team of biologists catch, examine, collect basic data, and band birds prior to their "soft release," which enables the birds to habituate themselves to their new surroundings and choose the moment of their exit. The biologists' work enables the future identification of individual birds, increasing our understanding of their migration and of the factors affecting their return and breeding success.

In the Amsden Gallery, the animation *What Birds Talk About When They Talk* humorously addresses the stakes of interpretation by exploring humankind's eternal fascination with bird songs and calls and inviting us to consider the effects of our interpretative acts: Do they foster connections across difference? Or limit our understanding of what non-human animals can think and do?

Look, it's daybreak, dear, time to sing stretches into the distant past while immersing us into possible futures. In the process, it invites us to expand our capacity to imagine and build shared future worlds for generations of avians, humans, and a host of other members of our planetary family.

—Sylvie Fortin, Curator

Captions (all works courtesy of the artists)
Cover: Production still from *Counting Birds for Five-minutes*, 2019, HD video with sound, 6:09 minutes (looped), from the series *The Violence of Care*.

Next page (from top to bottom):
Movement of Spot and Futures Market Prices for Agricultural Commodities (2005-2012), 2019, wood, ink, natural dyes, and paper, 72 x 24 x 23 cm.

Hedging vs. Speculation in the Chicago Wheat Market (1996 and 2011), 2019, wood, ink, natural dyes, and paper, 49 x 42 x 22 cm.

The Same 627-ha Area of Agricultural Land in Clay County, Nebraska (1933 and 2006), 2019, wood, ink, natural dyes, and paper, 36 x 36 x 4 cm.