

INCARNATAS: AN ARTIST IN RESIDENCE PRACTICE IN THE UBC BOTANICAL GARDEN

CELESTE SNOWBER

ABSTRACT:

This article shares poems from my artistic practice as a site-specific performing artist in the UBC Botanical Garden, where I was Artist in Residence for two years. Here I created and performed poetry and dance out of each season as I created amidst the various species of plants and trees which are both indigenous to British Columbia, and from all over Asia. As a dancer, poet, and scholar my task is to listen to the change and growth of creation in the garden, as well as research the botany of a garden. I explored embodied and poetic ways of inquiry where everything living informed my practice, performance and poetry. I offered full-length performances to the public, where I was able to share diverse ways of walking into wonder; literally they were walking performances. The garden offered multiple lessons to me and continues to be a place to attend deeply to the connections between the arts and ecology. The poems in this article sprung from my practice of going in the garden with feet, hips, hands and heart and may they encourage you, as the magnolias did for me, to bloom in impossible times.

BIO:

Celeste Snowber, PhD is a dancer, poet, writer and award-winning educator who is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. She has written extensively and her books include *Embodied Prayer*, *Landscapes of Aesthetic Education*, and *Embodied Inquiry: Writing, living and being through the body*. She has authored a collection of poetry called, *Wild Tourist* and co-authored with Sean Wiebe a collection called, *Blue Waiting*. Celeste is a site-specific performing artist and most recently was the Artist in Residence in the UBC Botanical garden for two years, creating and performing poetry and dance out of each season. She also continues to create full-length shows, sometimes collaborating with other musicians, combining dance, poetry and comedy. Celeste has three amazing adult sons and lives with her husband outside Vancouver. Celeste can be found dancing and writing between the edges of land and sea or at celestesnowber.com.

How do you know your own blooming?

How do we know our own blooming,
the beauty in each of us?

as much as you gaze
on the magnificence of magnolia
robust rhododendrons
passionate paperbark maple
dove-tree & lily of the valley bush

buds are growing within you
slowly, perceptively
asking to be watered.

The soul, the body thirsts
for air and water as do
the greening in the garden.
You are a garden
a hybrid paradox of beauty
fragile tendrils lie
in the soil of your heart.

Now is the time
to let the life you lead
be the mulch
of your own ripening.



Figure 1: ©Chris Randle

Getting lost

I let myself get lost
in your twist and turns
come upon another corner
of lush vegetation, outgrowing
the last time I peered
in your majesty. Only a few
weeks and you change
to another garden I revel
in your shifts, different shoots
leaves falling, fresh blossoms,
colors and hues changing by the day

time has another form here
in the territory of fertility
where timelessness and time are lovers
you teach me what matters
where an afternoon is a week
inside your canopy

Garden is our classroom

ardisia pulsia
clethra delavayi
delavay summersweet
melliodendron xylocarpum
cotoneaster
betula albosinens
crataegus and sorbus

you are the true organic
classroom, teaching us
that you thrive on the edge of salt
fresh air through our pores
your trees, plants, species
live side by side, intercepting
each other's branches and
you thrive
in each other's presence
you cooperate with your own nature
and ask nothing else of us
some of you oh botanica
have been taken from the wild
but you do not forget what
blooming you were made for
teach us to bloom again
towards our own beginnings
so we can live into the
colors we were meant to be.

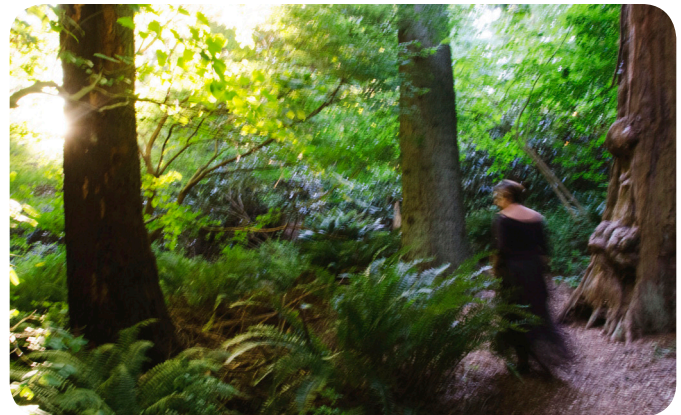


Figure 2: ©Tamar Haytayan



Figure 3: ©Yuka Takeda

Fertile Voice

Let your senses teach
what catches you in the garden

Here is the place to bring
the lens of your eyes and heart
sounds and silences,
textures and terrain to the earth.

Plants, trees and birds
leaves, moss, flora and forest
have a language unto their own.
Ancient before breath,
they have a fertile voice.

Our task is to listen
to the linguistics of creation
in a garden of wonder.

The bench's perspective

I wait in the space
between dawn and twilight
for small beauties
tiny miracles to unfold

one leaf at a time
twigs snapping
burgundy vines
magnolia in B flat
sonata of falling petals
scent of salt on cedar
cantatas of camellias
bold bamboo
ghongshanese rehderodendron
a horizon of maples

on the edge of the university
I wait for a human
to support their torso
while groundwater is ambient
look at the decay beneath my feet
the earth opens its soil
let the forest floor carry you
and know strength and fragility
are faithful partners.



Figure 4: ©Chris Randle

