

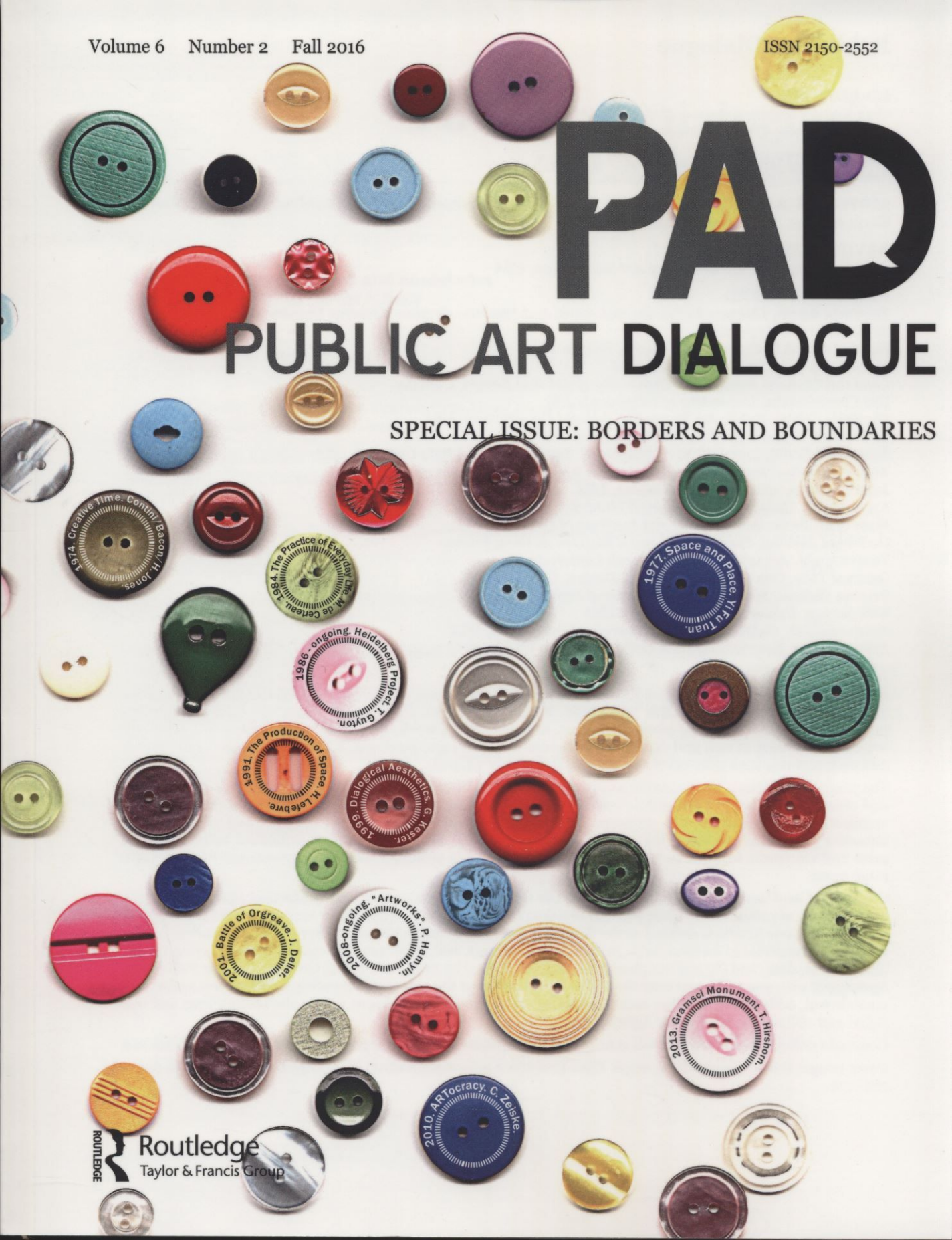
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PAD

PUBLIC ART DIALOGUE

SPECIAL ISSUE: BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES



ROUTLEDGE

Routledge

Taylor & Francis Group

A LITTLE FRIENDLY FLAGGING TAPE: A CONVERSATION ABOUT BORDER FREE BEES

Cameron Cartiere and Nancy Holmes

INTRODUCTION

Border Free Bees is a collaborative initiative to raise awareness about the plight of wild pollinators, empower communities to actively engage in solutions for habitat loss, and transform underutilized urban sites into aesthetically pleasing and environmentally sustainable spaces that serve as Pollinator Pastures as well as public spaces.

Many people have become aware of the global decline of honey bees, but in British Columbia alone, there are over 450 species of wild bees that play an integral role as pollinators in natural and managed ecosystems. These species are at risk of extinction, and while no single factor can be blamed for the global decline of bee populations, it is generally agreed that there are three key factors contributing to the bees' current plight: disease and parasites, pesticide use and loss of habitat. These factors also affect other pollinators such as wasps, flies, birds, bats and butterflies. The creation of new habitats for all of these threatened wild pollinators is crucial to the survival of these diverse insects and ultimately, to the sustainability of the wider ecosystem.

Border Free Bees is directed by Cameron Cartiere (Emily Carr University of Art + Design) and Nancy Holmes (The University of British Columbia Okanagan; UBC), in collaboration with numerous strategic partners. The initiative includes the Public Art Pollinator Pastures research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. This research project uses artistic practices and products to address problems related to food security, land use and pollinator population issues. By developing partnerships with concerned municipalities, this project combines public art, pollinator demonstration fields (Figure 1), community engagement events and multifaceted environmental based artworks in Kelowna and Richmond, British Columbia, Canada — two regions that contain the bulk of arable land in the province. Through community partners and with diverse artists in both cities, the research project creates these seasonal pastures to benefit a multitude of essential pollinators — including bees and other



Figure 1. Ready for seeding. Bridgeport Pollinator Pasture, Richmond, CA. Spring 2015. Photo credit: Geoff Campbell.

threatened insects — using public art as the driver for critical community engagement and site transformation. *Border Free Bees* is a collaborative structure that supports the two community engagement sites and pastures, maintains a website (<http://borderfreebees.com>), and is the platform for future outreach across political, national, sectoral and disciplinary borders and boundaries limiting the exchange of knowledge around pollinators.

The following month-long email conversation occurred in March 2016 between Holmes and Cartiere as they pondered the borders and boundaries of their collaborative project.

NANCY HOLMES (N.H.), 2 MARCH 2016

Since January 2016, we have been holding a series of talks called “The Pollinizing Sessions” at the public library in Kelowna, British Columbia. We’re getting 70 to 80 people at each session, cramming them into the library’s public meeting room. People are so keen, so interested, and so concerned about bees, the response is a bit overwhelming. People are coming with all kinds of questions, too. This week, a man came up to me and asked what he should do about a neighbor who sprays Sevin on her large cherry tree and then the pesticide blows all over his yard. I had no easy answer for him about how to talk to one’s neighbors or best ways to educate people about insects and our relationships with them and with food, but it

struck me that, among much else, this encounter raised a critical question about borders. While the man is not happy about the pesticide being sprayed in general, he is also upset about the violation of the "border" between his yard and his neighbor's. If the spray were paint, for example, and it had splashed all over his house or fence, the man could easily have forced some cease and desist order on the neighbor, but because the spray is invisible, it can cross unimpeded over that slightly less invisible line between the properties. This question has made me think about our project, Cameron, and our name "Border Free Bees," and I want to ask you where that name came from. What were your intentions? There are so many complex ideas wrapped up in the ideas of "borders," "freedom" and "bees." There is something about invisibility, permission, staking out, pulling down, separation and connection. Certainly, border-crashing bees and neighborhood floating poisons underscore the fact that ecologies and environments have boundaries and borders that often have nothing in common with national, civic or political boundaries, and that bees, wild creatures and invisible elements can force us to think about interconnectedness. Can you elaborate on some of the ideas wrapped up in that name for you?

CAMERON CARTIERE (C.C.), 3 MARCH 2016

I was born outside a border city (San Diego, California) so from a very early age I became aware of the influence and changing politics of these seemingly arbitrary lines that get drawn in the sand. My family owned a large egg ranch and so we had seasonal waves of people coming across the border from Mexico. Each year many of the same faces would return, usually men on the move simply wanting and needing to work and our land was a reliable source. At a certain point in the season, work opportunities would shift and people would head north to the Imperial Valley to pick strawberries or home to the south to help with the harvest on their own small farms that were being tended to by wives, children and grandparents. We moved away from the ranch when I was young, but it was our family business and every night we would hear about the daily happenings, so we were still aware of the ebb and flow of workers on the ranch. During my childhood, the politics of the border changed and it became more difficult for people to move back and forth. If you could make it across, you stayed north of the line. That meant fewer "family men" came to the ranch and the familiar nature of the workers changed.

When I began research for this project, I was struck by how much bees (both native and honeybees) are like migrant workers. Bees are on the move, following the flowers, working tremendously hard under the tight time constraints of the seasons. They are subject to changing conditions: the consequences of too much or too little rain, an unexpected windstorm, or countless days of blue skies in the

middle of February — the fickle moods of nature. And like migrant workers, they are subject to the changing politics and shifting boundaries of governmental agreements and trade deals. They are also subject to the invisible and artificial conditions in the countryside — exposure to pesticides, fields of monocultures and the economics of corporate versus family farming. Unlike migrant workers, however, if a bee is collecting pollen in a field in southern British Columbia and there are better flowers a kilometer away in Washington, the bee will simply fly over and collect what it needs and return to the hive. If the bee is a honeybee, and it is a good crop of flowers, the bee will perform a “waggle dance” and notify the other workers where to go. The bees don’t need passports or work visas — they just go and the job gets done.

That kind of freedom of movement inspires me on an intellectual level. The crisis facing native pollinators and honeybees affects all of us, regardless of which side of the border we may be on. So, if we are all struggling with the same problem, the means to a faster solution is to freely share information on what we are all doing to try and fix it. For me, that means freely crossing all sorts of borders: disciplinary, regional and academic. In this project you and I are crossing all sorts of disciplines: working with biologists, designers, farmers, artists, activists, writers, historians and gardeners. We are looking at regional differences and commonalities and adapting our Pollinator Pastures to accommodate those conditions. And most importantly we are opening up the academic borders between theory and practice through extensive community engagement.

It is also that “opening up” that is important to me: to open up the possibilities of this project as much as possible, while still being effective. We are meeting so many interesting people, with different backgrounds and different areas of interest, but we share this same overarching concern — fewer pollinators equals a lot less food and I certainly don’t want a world where there is little fresh fruit and vegetables, let alone coffee or chocolate.

N.H., 7 MARCH 2016

Chocolate and coffee are key markers of the global issues around pollinators, aren’t they? This isn’t just a North American problem. There are no borders and boundaries for bees or for the forces that are harming them. A new study was just released last week by the United Nations that warns of a pending global pollination crisis. It’s the first global assessment of the threats to creatures that pollinate the world’s plants and food crops. The report is a compendium and analysis of a stupendous number of research papers by a group of scientists. Their conclusions are that many pollinator species are threatened with extinction, including some 16 percent of vertebrates like birds and bats. Extinction rates for insects are not so easy to measure, the report notes, but it warns of

“high levels of threat” for some bees and butterflies, with “at least 9 percent of bee and butterfly species at risk.”¹ It’s clear that political and national borders are no protection at all for certain environmental issues — first climate change and now the pollination crisis. Freedom of movement can be a blessing but also a danger. The more one thinks about borders and bees the more complex and ecologically fraught the entanglement of our lives and the lives of other beings with boundaries becomes. In fact, there is also something frightening about the idea of border free bees, a specter that haunts us such as the fellow fuming about his neighbor’s pesticide spraying. Since our boundaries are so permeable and because of our interconnectedness, the protections we put up to fortress ourselves are ephemeral or illusionary and unintended victims are left exposed. Bees and neonicotinoids (insecticides that affect the central nervous system of insects and that are used widely in agriculture to protect crops from insect predation) are a prime example of how boundaries are dangerously crossed and borders are frighteningly permeable. Recent research is showing real evidence that pesticides intended to control damaging insects jump over “boundaries” of our human-constructed categories that separate “pest” insects from other insects.² The chemicals are sideswiping bees and other beneficial pollinators.

We (by which I mean North American or Euro-ethnic dominant cultures) have an ambivalent attitude toward and relationship with boundaries and borders: we want them to protect us and yet we chafe against them as a restraint. We want to believe in them but sometimes their invisibility means they truly are not there. Evidence all around us shows we are imprisoned in or we embrace as necessary many political and disciplinary borders, yet we are blind to the physical bonds to nature and the needed restraints regarding appropriate behavior in the natural world. This area of ambiguity and ambivalence is, as you note, a very rich place to do research and to think.

Yet, you are absolutely right to claim that openness is a key to our project. Mark Winston, a bee scientist whose book *Bee Time* won a Governor General’s award for non-fiction in 2015 (Canada’s highest literary honor) says something similar about how bees cross all kinds of borders. To add to what you’ve already said about bees as migrant workers with a sometimes free pass, Winston notes that bees also “bridge” social divisions³ — you can see this at beekeeper conventions and in projects like Vancouver’s Hives for Humanity project where bee hives are introduced to impoverished communities with high rates of substance abuse and homelessness.⁴ As you also mention, Winston says that bees cross “the boundary between feral and managed.”⁵ Honeybees move between wild and managed spaces but wild bees also move between wild and managed spaces — bees seem to be unique amongst both our domesticated and wild co-inhabitants of places as they knit together pathways of experience and survival between these divisions. In fact, Winston notes that urban bees are possibly the best model we can have to “reinvigorate our relationship with the land.”⁶ They are resilient themselves and the spaces they bounce between are diverse, especially in

suburbs and other places where flowers and gardens are more plentiful. I think this observation can lead us to some thoughts about our methodology — both of us in suburban spaces, both of us in disciplines outside of science or urban planning or environmental studies, both of us with one foot in the feral or wild places of art and one foot in the managed spaces of the academic world.

C.C., 11 MARCH 2016

Interesting you should mention Mark Winston as I was at an event last night here in Vancouver called “Pollinators and the City,” for which he was the chair. There were many interesting aspects to the evening, but one of the most notable was that the large lecture hall was filled to capacity. Winston also took note of the crowd and in his introduction affirmed that less than a decade ago, one of his bee talks would have drawn a dedicated crowd of four or five people, half of whom would be asleep after the first 10 minutes. He was inspired that so many people, not just “bee nerds,” are drawn to the crisis surrounding the decline in bees.

Certainly pollinators, and the honey bees in particular, have been at the forefront of peoples’ minds of late. In 2014 Barack Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum calling for the creation of a federal strategy to promote the health of honey bees and other pollinators in the USA.⁷ Less than a year later, the Pollinator Health Task Force produced three documents: the actual strategy, accompanying action plan and the appendices to the strategy.⁸ While the strategy and the action plan are huge strides toward better bee health, it was the appendices that struck me most, particularly in light of the notion of border free bees. The appendices included the “Pollinator Protection” plans of 14 different federal departments and agencies ranging from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Agriculture to the US Army Corp of Engineers, to the Smithsonian Institution and the Department of Transportation. While one would expect a plan from the EPA, a series of plans from so many other departments coming together on a single issue really struck me. The little bee has managed to accomplish what so many politicians and lobbyists have failed to do — effectively crossing departmental boundaries and agency borders.

I see the bee having the same effect in our own project. Through this common interest in and concern for native pollinators, we have been able to cross all sorts of borders — those of regions, disciplines, departments — and we have been able to work with so many different people to draw together two cities, two universities, numerous municipal departments, a broad range of faculties, school groups, community organizations, environmental groups, local businesses, artists, galleries and an incredible cross-section of the general public.

N.H., 21 MARCH 2016

This broad range has also been one of the project's biggest challenges as well as its greatest strengths, hence the long gap of time between your comments above and now mine. I've been involved in about six community engagement events in the past week and haven't had a minute to do much else! I have been most impressed by how superb you are at knitting connections between institutions, crossing over institutional and sectorial boundaries. I wonder if this strength develops out of your background in public art. Public art seems to be a practice that has to negotiate the fraught relations between artists and institutions (often political ones) as well as the public at large. I wonder if you could talk more about that ability, what you do that makes it work so well for you, and maybe outline what the boundaries and hurdles might be and how you seem to leap over them or they melt away with the pressure of your unstoppable energy and enthusiasm. How do you get these partners so engaged? What is there in your practice as well as in your character that serves you? You seem to have forged particularly strong connections with municipal and business partners, as well as art institutions like the Richmond Art Gallery. It seems these very strong links have been created over time but their resilience and reciprocal nature are also the result of your skills and abilities. You know that my relationship with the City of Kelowna and the Kelowna Art Gallery is far more thinly established and I am always coaxing back to life their flickering interest in the Pollinator Pasture. Not that they are not committed, but your partners seem to be particularly activated and motivated.

I think my strengths are more with what we might call "the general public" or the community. Most of my eco artwork has been with community groups or in places important to segments in my community, working with people on the ground who have little or no official connection to larger institutional agencies in the community. My boundary challenging goal is to bring the University into communities in order to be a willing co-creator of knowledge and art. Faculty and administrators at our campus at UBC have used the phrase that our community is "a living laboratory." I've always disliked and distrusted this phrase. Laboratories are bordered and bounded by all sorts of control mechanisms and strict protocols and quarantines and, of course, the inhabitants of laboratories are often subjected to experiments. I am opposed to thinking of universities and communities as having research laboratory relationships in which there is a big university one-way glass mirror between the campus/researcher and community members. Certainly, community based eco artwork is a very different beast. There should be no wall, no jargon fences, no sense that one group has more knowledge than another, no hierarchical knowledge keeping and managing. I suspect science and social science at times should be less "managing" as well in their research, though I know that controlled experiments are essential to science, of course.

Maybe the purpose of art generated knowledge making and discovery is to dismantle those boundaries of control and management and move into the uncontrolled to see what's there.

Our Kelowna project has begun with co-education between ourselves and the general public. I have started out with the assumption that the artists and students on my team and the Kelowna community at large are starting from the same place — we don't really know much about bees, though we have loads of other kinds of expertise and experience. With that basic assumption, we set up a series of nine talks and three workshops in partnership with the Okanagan Regional Library. We invited experts on bees, pollination, plants, traditional indigenous knowledge, agriculture, science, bee art, and woodworking (to make bumble bee homes!) and have spent the first five months of 2016 in an intensive educational mode. We are coming together at these talks in surprisingly large numbers — Master Gardeners, backyard vegetable growers, local beekeepers, high school students and teachers. Our workshops have waiting lists and we are cramming 80 to 90 people into the Library's public presentation room. It's been an amazing experience to watch the growing wonder and enthusiasm of these community members and ourselves. I and my team of five students are all becoming bee fans and bee lovers, and we are beginning to feel we are starting to get truly introduced to bees. One of the keys I think to the Pollinizing Sessions' success is not only the Library's wonderful partnership (an institutional link formed primarily because the new adult education coordinator is a former brilliant student!) but also a sense that our pollinator team is not a group of experts unidirectionally pouring wisdom and scholarship into the ears of our listeners, but that we begin each talk putting ourselves in the same position as the audience. We too are learners; we are here to discover more about bees from some amazing people in our local community and from outside the region, and we are experiencing the same amazement and concern, delight and surprise as our audience. The border between the research team and the community is almost completely blurred. And this strangely draws more and more people to us. They want to talk to us. They come up to me or one of my students and say: "I will never look at a bumble bee the same way again." And we mirror their enthusiasm and wonder: "Yes, me too! I couldn't believe it when Brian Campbell told us about the magic of buzz pollination!" And we mutually reinforce each other's astonishment. Which I guess relates to my own practice as an artist and poet. It seems to be one of the artist's jobs to find opportunities to open up audiences and readers to emotion and wonder and sometimes hard truths in a manner that is not didactic, simplistic or one-way. This mutuality of experiencing something is the art practice here. My next goal is to approach the planting of the pasture with a similar knowledge and spirit of co-creation.

C.C., 28 MARCH 2016

Funny you should say I am good at getting partners to engage because this morning, when others were enjoying their Easter Monday holiday, I was in the pasture re-stringing the flagging tape to keep people on the path and off the new growth coming up from the seeds we spread last October. So today it was just me (sans partners) and 4000 feet of flagging tape — sometimes this work is really a labor of love. That being said, we really have been able to bring together many different collaborations and I think that you are correct, that it is a public art background that is really helping to support the project now. Public art requires us to practice in public. We do not have the perceived safety of the white cube or the boundary of the museum entrance. Most people do not come to see our work intentionally; rather, they happen upon it as part of their daily travels and because of these unintentional encounters, reactions can be quite unpredictable. To some extent, as public artists, we have crossed the boundary. We have stepped out of the museum and the gallery to work in the public realm and that means we are now part of a public conversation.

What interests me about stepping outside the boundaries of the museum and the gallery is how art in the public realm really can bring people together. Inside the museum, we talk about the art. Outside the museum, we still talk about the art, but we also have more opportunity to be part of the art and the art has more opportunity to be part of a larger system of public negotiations. Any public artwork, even the most self-contained public sculpture, involves numerous people to enter into public space. Aside from the artist, there are administrators, engineers, planners, fabricators and installers. You might need people to redirect traffic if a sculpture is being installed in a city center, or a biologist if a work is going to be sited in a park. There are permits to attain and engineering drawings to be approved. Notifications need to be sent out. Sometimes you need public consultation or permissions from private landlords. The list of people can be quite extensive. I see each of these people not as a barrier to a project, but as a relationship within the project. Individuals each have their own expertise and they can bring something to the project that is beyond what I can bring. That includes the individuals who simply walk past the artwork every day. They will probably be much more familiar with the daily activity of the site than any of the municipal experts. They will be the first to notice if something happens to the artwork, and they will have more of an opportunity to be daily ambassadors for the work.

At the Richmond pasture, some of our best promoters of the project are the local residents. They let us know what park users are saying about the development of the pasture and they let us know if there are any problems or concerns. We have been able to gain support by responding quickly to resident questions and comments. Mostly people just want more information or clarification, but

sometimes they have genuine fears: “Will the bees from the pasture invade my backyard?” “How do I tell a bee from a wasp?” “Why are you wasting my tax dollars on insects?” Sometimes you have the answers they want to hear: “The pasture is designed for wild pollinators and any bumble bees that come into your garden will benefit your flowers and vegetables.” “Bees tend to be fuzzy and wasps tend to be smooth — not always, but often.” “One out of every three bites you eat is thanks to a pollinator, so I would say this is an excellent application of public funds.” Sometimes, regardless of the answers you do have, it is simply not what they want to hear. In those rare cases, I have found that people just need to be heard. At those moments I give of my time and attention like a bee focused on a particular flower. But also like the bee, I don’t linger too long as there is much work to do and sometimes there are borders that simply can’t be crossed.

N.H., 30 MARCH 2016

I like to think of you out in the Richmond pasture with that flagging tape — marking a courteous though distinct boundary between the human path and the bee meadow. We have come full circle back to our neighbors and how so much of what we must do is learn to live with each other. Learning to live with other people, other disciplines, and other species involves a skillful mediation of boundaries and barriers. In the end, it comes down to learning to talk to each other, or in the case of humans and non-humans, learning how to pay attention and “hear” what other beings are telling us. We need to be sensitive to how the borders and boundaries can be both membrane (connection) and wall (protection); windows (look) and doors (enter); places where we touch and places where we gently separate. Ideally, *Border Free Bees* can help us move toward a day when bees will not need a border to protect them from humans, our rapacious land grabs and our poisons, and toward a time when we can cohabitate healthy places with the help of a little friendly flagging tape. Though that flagging tape sometimes has to be unfurled by one committed, dedicated and open-hearted person willing to lead the way.

NOTES

¹ John Schwartz, “Decline of Pollinators Poses Threat to World Food Supply, Report Says,” *New York Times*, 26 Feb. 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/27/science/decline-of-species-that-pollinate-poses-a-threat-to-global-food-supply-report-warns.html?_r=0 (accessed 7 Mar. 2016).

² D. Stanley, et al. “Neonicotinoid Pesticide Exposure Impairs Crop Pollination Services Provided by Bumblebees,” *Nature* 528.24–31 (2015): 248–257.

³ Mark L. Winston, *Bee Time: Lessons from the Hive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 131.

⁴ See this organization’s website: <http://hivesforhumanity.com/>.

⁵ Winston, *Bee Time*, 229.

⁶ *Ibid*, 229.

⁷ “Presidential Memorandum — Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators,” Office of the Secretary, White House, 20 Jun. 2014. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/20/presidential-memorandum-creating-federal-strategy-promote-health-honey-b> (accessed 11 Mar. 2016).

⁸ Pollinator Health Task Force, “National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators,” 19 May 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/Pollinator%20Health%20Strategy%202015.pdf> (accessed 11 Mar. 2016).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Cameron Cartiere is associate professor at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Dr. Cartiere is a practitioner, writer and researcher specializing in public art, curatorial practice, urban renewal, community engagement and environmental art. She is the author of *RE/Placing Public Art* (Verlag, 2010), co-editor of *The Practice of Public Art*, and co-author of the *Manifesto of Possibilities: Commissioning Public Art in the Urban Environment* (Springer, 2010). Her most recent book (with Martin Zebracki, University of Leeds, United Kingdom) is *The Everyday Practice of Public Art: Art, Space, and Social Inclusion* (Routledge, 2016). She is a recognized expert in the public art field and is actively involved in a number of international advisory boards and work groups dedicated to advancing the cultural, social and economic value of public art.

Nancy Holmes is associate professor at the University of British Columbia. Holmes has published five collections of poetry, most recently *The Flicker Tree: Okanagan Poems* (Ronsdale, 2012). She is the editor of *Open Wide a Wilderness: Canadian Nature Poems* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009). Place, community and artistic collaboration are her key academic interests, along with her commitment to the writing and teaching of poetry and fiction. Over the past few years, she has become increasingly active in eco-themed community based art projects with her students and other artists. These projects include the *Woodhaven Eco Art Project* (<http://www.woodhaven.ok.ubc.ca/>); and with Denise Kenney (her colleague in Interdisciplinary Performance) several initiatives of the Eco Art Incubator, a large-scale research project federally funded by Canada’s Social Science and Humanities Research Council (<http://ecoartincubator.com>).

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