

LINK

BCIT & BEYOND



APRIL 2019

student spotlight
AHMADULLAH RAHMAT

art & photography feature
MIKE ROBERTSON

enhancing empathy
with virtual reality

+ more

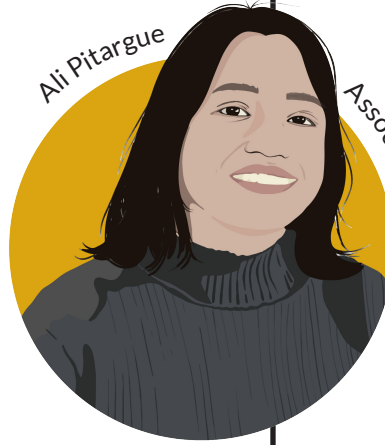
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The Bigger Picture


For many BCIT programs, the semester is coming to its climax in April, and it's 'crunch time'. There are exams to write, assignments to hand in, and projects to churn out. This is also a time when graduating students begin to ruminate on long-term goals and form a big picture that embodies their time at BCIT.

Tasks and goals are going to rain down on plenty of us, but there's this adage that we all can look to: "April showers bring forth May flowers." By that, we mean that the Maelstrom of April will soon come to a close, and you'll have the opportunity to explore the world outside of projects, deadlines, and BCIT.

The features in this April issue cover a wide range of topics that we hope inspire some worldly thinking. We reflect on the possibility of bringing back extinct animals, journalism in Afghanistan, and the connection between art and psychology. In high-stress situations, it may be instinctive for students to adopt a tunnel vision work ethic, but looking at the bigger picture of things could expand your horizons.

Here at Link, we're hoping to do just that. We're happy to announce that we're not wrapping things up just yet this school year. There will be a special May edition of Link that will cover special topics of interest. For one, we are going to explore the new NE1 Pavilion cafeteria opening in May. We're (as always) on the lookout for new contributors, and we'll soon be hiring new staff as well.

For this April issue, we hope we can inspire you to traverse new avenues. In the end, the fruits of your hard work will look better if you take a step back from dissecting your grades up-close, and look at how what you've learned could impact the world around you.



LINK

BCIT & BEYOND

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LINK is published eight times annually by students at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). We feature exceptional people in our community, big ideas in a changing world, and evolving social dialogue. We welcome writers, photographers and artists of all backgrounds and abilities. Our purpose is to provide a collaborative platform for student expression, and to connect you with one another's stories and experiences. Printed editions are distributed to all five BCIT campuses and additional content is published online at **LINKBCIT.CA**

Have an idea?
Contact us!

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Bright news for a bright issue. At *Link* we deliver good news first.

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Species are going extinct at a rapidly increasing rate. Is bringing them back ethical?



GOOD NEWS

POACHERS TO THANK

Snow leopards are now off of the endangered species list, after a smart move from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in Russia. The WWF hired local poachers, who had exceptional tracking skills, to assist as researchers to monitor the big cats.



ADIDAS RECYCLES

Adidas has been making shoes made from plastic beach waste for four years now, and those shoes have been continuously selling out. As a result, the company plans to make 11 million pairs of these shoes in 2019—a 6 million increase from 2018.

HIV POSITIVE

The first ever organ donation from a living person with HIV happened in late March at John Hopkins University School of Medicine. The anonymous recipient of the kidney also lives with HIV.





STONER IDOL

Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg, Canadian filmmaking duo (Superbad, Pineapple Express, Sausage Party) are about to launch another collaboration: a cannabis company called Houseplant which will sell exclusively in Canada. The company's first strain of cannabis is called Houseplant Sativa and will be available in early April through regulated retailers and online in British Columbia. Other strains, including Houseplant Hybrid and Houseplant Indica, as well as soft gels and pre-rolled joints, will follow later in the year

Rogen took over Vancouver's skytrains with his voice overs last year. Now he's laying claim to its cannabis. He has quickly become every Vancouverite's stoner idol.

ISKWEW AIR

Canada's first Indigenous-owned and woman-owned airline launched on March 8th in Vancouver, just in time for International Women's Day. Teara Fraser, a Métis woman, founded Iskwew Air. "Iskwew" means "woman" in Cree. The airline will fly charter services in a single Piper Navajo plane. The airline collaborated Homalco Wildlife & Cultural Tours in Campbell River, where they will provide remote nature excursions. In launching the airline, Fraser partnered with the Give Them Wings organization, an initiative to inspire Indigenous youth of all genders to engage careers in aviation. She says she wants to alleviate the shortage of Indigenous people in the aviation workforce.

CATARACTS

Cataracts might not be a problem for the majority of BCIT students, but they affect thousands worldwide. The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) is addressing the benefits of a revolutionary eye drop that can significantly reduce cataracts. The eye drop formula has already been approved for dogs and rabbits, and is on the market for both--now they just need to get it approved for humans. Currently, surgery is the most well-known method for removing cataracts in humans, so this would provide a non-invasive option. Additional testing is being done now, but it appears to be quite promising, and the AAO says: "eye drops could be widely distributed in remote, resource-scarce areas where surgery is difficult to deliver or even unavailable."

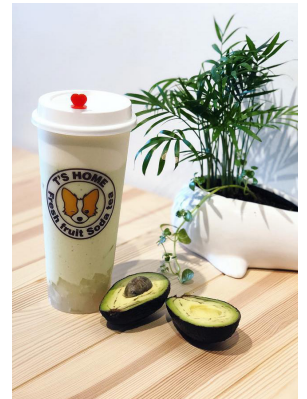
don't take our word for it.

Alright—we could only play so many video games this semester, and eat at so many restaurants. This issue, we're giving you some reviews of things we had the time and budget to try: free apps, fruit tea, and art shows. Want to publish a review? Send it to editor@linkbcit.ca

drink this.

T's Home
5318 Grimmer Street,
Burnaby, BC

As we tuck our winter coats into storage, iced drinks start to become appealing again. T's Home is a tiny shop tucked just off of Royal Oak, recognizable by the logo: a winking brown and white dog (a papillon named "Tuan Tuan" who belongs to the owners of the shop). T's Home is a "Fresh Fruit Soda Tea" establishment. Many drinks are served with a fork as well as a straw, because of the enormous amount of fruit in them. If you're going, expect to wait a bit—not for a lineup, but for the time it takes to prepare each drink from scratch. They slice the fruit, blend it, and garnish it in front of you. I've tried the avocado tea with fresh coconut and cheese foam (excellent) and the matcha macchiato milk tea with pearls (also good). If you haven't tried cheese foam before, we suggest you do so ASAP.

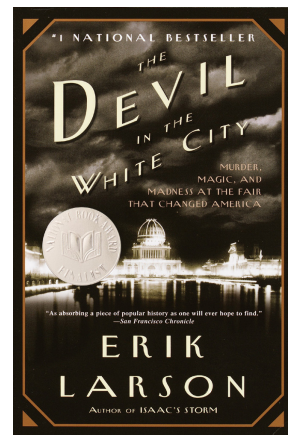


— shaleeta harrison

read this.

The Devil in the White City:
*Murder, Magic and Madness at
the Fair That Changed America*
Erik Larson
Vintage Books

The Devil in the White City is a book that can attest to the old saying, "truth is stranger than fiction." Erik Larson tells a true story set in Chicago's 1893 World's Fair about a serial killer who wandered the expo to lure victims into his 'murder castle'. The author intertwines the narratives of two distinct figures: the aforementioned murderer H.H. Holmes and the World's Fair architect, Daniel Burnham. Both men's stories are fascinating, but many readers assert that the architect's journey was actually the more alluring of the two. Written like a novel, Larson effortlessly drums up the macabre mood of its setting, conjuring thrill and intrigue from its readers about an under-told era of American history.



— ali pitargue

go to this.

**French Moderns:
Monet to Matisse**
1850 - 1950
Vancouver Art Gallery
02/21-05/20

If you love art history, no doubt you're headed to the Vancouver Art Gallery to get a taste of what would seem like a gathering of rock stars at Woodstock. The VAG is hosting some high-profile special guests this season; these include but are not limited to Claude Monet, Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Auguste Rodin—the French Moderns. Sixty-three paintings were handpicked from the Brooklyn Museum's collection of French modern art. Mind you, the works featured are nowhere near the same caliber as the Louvre or the Musée d'Orsay, but walking the gallery halls would allow you a small taste of 19th and 20th century Paris, the central hub of artistic modernity and the avant-garde.

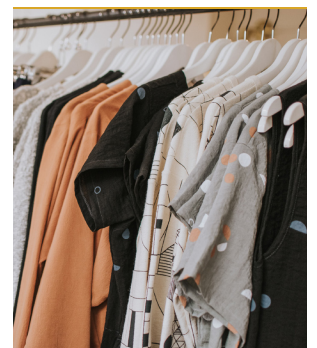


— ali pitargue

download this.

Good on You
Ethical Consumers Australia
App Store & Google Play

Interested in sustainable fashion but don't know where to start? Download the "Good on You" app. It has a data base of over 2,000 fashion brands that have been assessed against a robust rating system for their impact on three things - people, the planet and animals. A rating out of five is given for each category as well as an overall score. Brands are rated 'We Avoid', 'Not Good Enough', 'It's a Start', 'Good' and 'Great.' This app gives you the power to check brand ratings while you shop, discover new ethical and sustainable fashion labels, and get exclusive offers from the best brands.

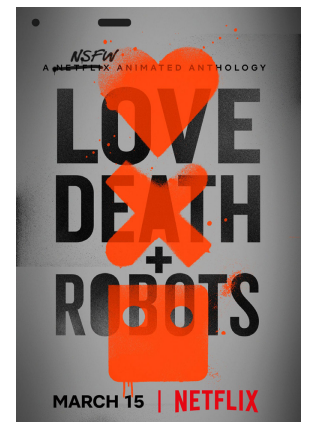


— rajita dang

watch this.

Love, Death, & Robots
Netflix

This 18-episode anthology of adult rated animated shorts was released to Netflix on March 15th. The unique and visceral episodes are only connected by the title theme; they have something to do with love, death, or robots. The anthology uses drastically different kinds of animation, from 2D to photo-real 3D CGI, to bring to life stories from well-known authors of short fiction. Only two of the episodes weren't based on existing stories. The genres include science fiction (of course), fantasy, horror, and comedy. Some of the episodes are undeniably better than others, but every 'top five' list arranges them differently. Watch them all, (it will take about 3 hours) and then decide which are your favorites.

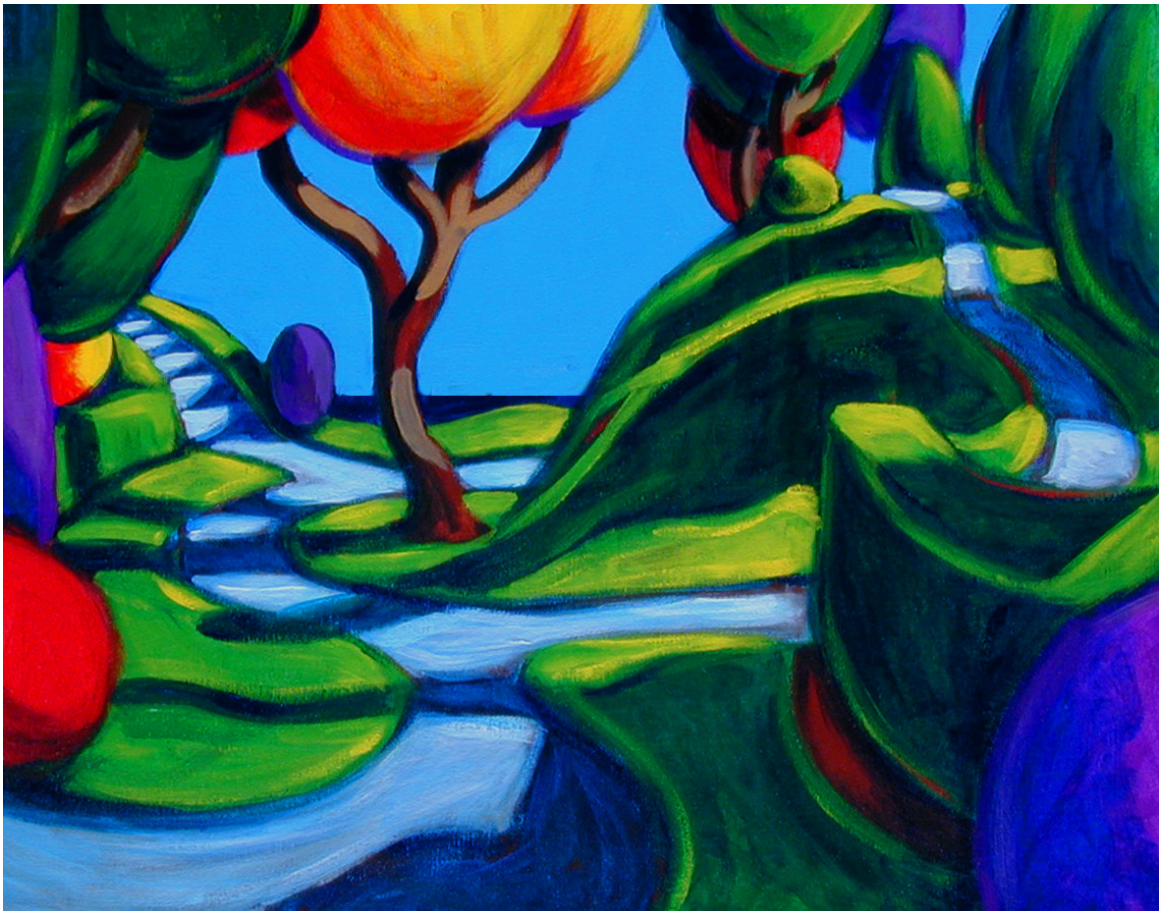


— shaleeta harrison

Mike Robertson

photographer & painter

Mike Robertson is a BCIT student in the video production and editing associate certificate program. He is also a full time Graphic Artist and Art Director for Roots of Fight (rootsoffight.com). Mike Robertson is an avid skier, a dog lover, and a life-long resident of Vancouver, who grew up on the North Shore.



The Bend (above) and Cadillac (left)









Ravenwoods (above) and Grizzly Bear Mountain (right)





*“Autism is not a condition
that needs ‘treatment’”*

To Virtually Enhance Empathy

words Ali Pitargue

The Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society is using virtual reality technology (VR) to help enable people to empathize with children who have autism. As part of the Autism Demystification® program, the organization aims to foster peer social relationships

One in 66 Canadian children have autism, or what is more appropriately termed autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Most commonly, this condition is characterized by hardships with social interaction and repetitive behaviours. Given these characteristics, what resulted is a widespread misconception about autism being a so-called 'empathy disorder', or the stereotype of people with autism having a lack of empathy. Many autism researchers and advocates continue to fight the good fight in dismantling this belief, because ironically, people with autism can be capable of feeling too much.

There is no question that emotions can be difficult to maintain for people with ASD, but this begs the question: why is it presumed that the onus is on people with autism to be conditioned for empathic traits, when people without autism (questionably) have a supposed bigger capacity for emotional intelligence?

Autism is not a condition that needs 'treatment'. Heather McCracken, an autism advocate, has worked tirelessly to reversing this stigma. "Treatment is a term from the old medical model. In the medical model, autism is considered to be 'bad' and someone with autism is considered as someone that requires 'fixing'. But today we understand that autism is a neurological condition. And we embrace neurodiversity."

It turns out, neurotypicals (people without autism) are the ones who need help in mustering empathy. For many, that help could come in the form of virtual reality technology. The BC-based autism charitable organization, Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society developed a virtual reality program that lets neurotypicals experience what it feels like to have autism. It is a part of the Autism Demystification® program—an initiative to provide educational programs to foster social inclusion for individuals with autism. Heather McCracken serves as its founder and executive director.

"It is all about triggering the user's mirror neurons and supporting the user to have feelings of empathy towards individuals with autism," says McCracken.

Summoning empathy is key. According to McCracken, empathy is the starting point for developing friendships. This is likely why the VR simulator is specifically set in a school setting,

Friend 2 Friend had already been running other Autism Demystification® programs prior to its development of VR. Namely, the puppet program and simulation game program, which they provide in school settings for youths aged 3 to 18.



ASD is usually diagnosed within the first three years of a child's life, which especially poses an obstacle once the child gets introduced to social environments like schools and playgrounds. For someone with ASD, friends can be hard to come by, especially in environments like schools that tend to have social hierarchies imposed. Friend 2 Friend wants to change this landscape.

Heather McCracken is a mother of three, one of whom is a now 25-year-old son with autism named Iain. When Iain first went through the public education system circa 1998, McCracken noticed that there were no educational programs that teach about autism. "I recognized the need for school-based programs that would teach peers to not only to understand their peers with autism (and other types of neurodiversity) but to teach peers how to communicate, socialize and play with their peers with autism."



This was when she started to research and build the foundation of Autism Demystification® programs. In 2002, McCracken founded Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society. The organization would go on to develop the aforementioned Autism Demystification® programs, as well as host seminars and professional development training sessions. They've generated some substantial results, but in 2015, they decided that it was time to take it a step further. The logical step would be to integrate the latest technological innovations, namely Virtual Reality (VR).



McCracken collaborated with James Jacobs the CEO of Ziva Dynamics, to develop a virtual reality simulator. They would call it the Virtual Reality Autism Demystification® Program (VRADP). The program was kick-started in May of 2018, but Friend 2 Friend is still encountering financial barriers to develop the program further. For now, after also enlisting the help of a Seattle-based team at Valve, the program is still in the demo stage. A demo station was set up in Friend 2 Friend's newly-opened New Westminster location. They have delivered the program to over 50,000 youths and 35,000 adults. McCracken says that the program is something that the individual has to experience

images from the Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society

for themselves. When a user dons the VR gear, they are transported to an elementary classroom setting. They are tasked with a spelling test, where the user can grab letters floating in the air to spell out words like 'friendship'. Everyone's response time is different, but the task usually poses minimal difficulty for a neurotypical individual. The user is then asked to repeat the test, but this time with more distractions and they are afforded with less control. This is when the realizations set in.

After the demo, the user is given a survey assessing on a scale of 1 to 5, how the program enabled them to empathize with individuals who have autism. If the user has autism themselves, they also ask if the simulation resembles their own experiences. This would be key in order to further develop the program.

Autism cannot be thought of as a singular disorder but rather, it contains a broad range of neurodevelopmental conditions. Hence, autism spectrum disorder. "The old saying is, 'If you know one person with autism, then you know one person with autism,'" imparts McCracken. The program is not focused on educating about autism in a theoretical sense. Rather, the greater concern lies with fostering a social environment for those with autism.

As modern society evolves to recognize all kinds of diversity—neurodiversity in this case—the onus is on neurotypicals to assuage the social difficulties that individuals with autism encounter. McCracken encourages everyone to spread the word. "We have built the Society entirely by word of mouth. Support the Society, the programs and the individuals with autism we serve by telling two people about us and ask them to tell two people and so on."

Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society is looking for support in developing the program. They're looking out for those who have experience in building gaming applications, plus they train people who are in health sciences and education. Feel free to reach out!

*'If you know
one person
with autism,
then you know
one person
with autism'*

¹ Autism Canada, "One in 66 Canadian Children and Youth are on the Autism Spectrum" Autism Canada (2018)

² Brewer, Rebecca & Murphy, Jennifer "People with Autism Can Read Emotions, Feel Empathy" Scientific American (2016)



student spotlight

Ahmadullah Rahmat

Journalist // Leader // Entrepreneur

words & photography **Sean Murphy**

During my first practicum rotation in the BCIT Broadcast and Online Journalism program, I was running around grasping at ideas, trying to make newsworthy stories out of nothing. At one point, I turned to a classmate, Ahmadullah Rahmat (who goes by Rahmat), to see what he was doing. Not only was he fully caught up with his coursework, he was making a video for himself. He came here from Kandahar, Afghanistan. An attack in Afghanistan that killed eight journalists on April 30th, 2018 was personal for him. He knew four of those journalists, and he was making a video documenting the tragedy and who they were.

That was a year ago. Since then, there have been multiple attacks on journalists that have resulted in permanent wounds or death in Afghanistan. For Rahmat, he's now co-opted his own business that reports on the political strife in Afghanistan, and he delivers the news on his website in English and in Pashto. He intends to open a radio station in Kandahar. He formed the business plan during the newly implemented Media Entrepreneurship in the Broadcast program.

During his time with the Peak Leadership program, he's also found the desire to get back into teaching, a role he filled before he came to BCIT. Rahmat wants to share what he's learned in the program here with budding journalists in Afghanistan.

We sat down to speak with him about the state of journalism in Afghanistan, and the Peak leadership program that he went through.



What brought you to BCIT?

Many of my friends in Afghanistan had an interest in journalism, so it was always in the back of my mind. I decided on BCIT, because someone I knew had gone here. The difficult part was that I had to pass an entrance exam that tested how you speak English, how you write English, the history of Canada, and local current events. I used to be a director at an English Language institute in Kandahar, with more than 40 English language teachers working under my supervision, but I still was nervous about my language skills.

But, I passed the entrance exam. I was very happy when I made it to the program at BCIT and felt that this is where I wanted to be.

During the first few weeks of my program, the instructors were so helpful and so well educated. When you compare the journalism classes in Afghanistan and at BCIT, there is a huge difference. Everything they taught me was delivered with a very good methodology.

What were some of the biggest changes going from Afghanistan to Canada?

There is a cultural difference—you can't tell what is news and what's not news. I would find the story ideas and I would think something might not be newsworthy.

For example, an organization that would raise money by trimming dog nails, and they would donate money to something. I was like, "how can this make the news?" I later understood that these stories are the human-interest stories that people find interesting.

What do you think were some of the most practical skills that you learned going through the program?

There were many skills, like finding what is important in a story, and what people want me to tell them.

Whenever I write a story, I just think: what information should I bring into my story that the public wants to know? I think this has been one skill that I always keep in mind—the news determinants. The proximity,



prominence, interests, impact, and all those things.

Another skill is background sound. I think it makes a huge impact when people are listening to a story or your documentary. It's important to tell the audience where you are, if that's through ambient sound or words. You just bring the person into the situation you're in.

All of these are skills that don't really depend on the language you are writing.

So, let's talk about your business you co-opted to.

In the first year of BCIT Journalism, you learn almost everything that you need, but you just need some more practice, which you do in the second year. So once the third semester was over, I came up with an idea to launch my own business. I thought that the competition is not easy here in Canada. But in Afghanistan, it is. So why not start with a news website there? So, I made a business plan. I planned for a news website

first, then a radio station, and one day, maybe TV.

I've hired two reporters in Afghanistan. I'm working as the online editor. They send me information and I write news stories using skills that I learned at BCIT. The website is up and running in two languages, Pashto and English. I will translate it into Farsi as well, when I graduate from school. The website is called Atlas News, atlasnewsafg.com. It's mostly news based in Kandahar.

Can you tell me about the Peak Leadership program?

It's an extra curriculum program offered through the Student Association that students at BCIT can take for free. It's practical leadership experience. You discover yourself and you attend professional sessions of leaders from the industry, and they talk to you about the leadership skills and what they do and how they have got success for their companies, societies or organizations. We had to do a leadership challenge and a self-reflection after every session, which was very helpful.

Who do you think would most benefit from taking the Peak Leadership program?

I think it's important for every person, especially for those who are in the business sector or in community work. Leadership skills can be applied to family, business, office, everywhere. It's very important.

Are there any direct links between a leadership program and journalism?

In both, it's very important to deliver a message clearly and concisely. Journalism and leadership have so much in common. I would say the peak leadership program would be very beneficial to a journalist.

Can you tell me more about news and reporting in Afghanistan?

I have seen, what I call, "lazy journalism" in Afghanistan. I've seen so many journalists who don't actually bother to go really spend time or know more about the story, find the facts and the range of people in it. When I used to watch a story on CNN or CBC or other international media outlets, I was really into those stories. Before I came to BCIT, I couldn't say why these stories were so engaging—but I know now that it's because these stories have real people, real consequences.

Can you tell me what World Press Freedom means to you?

There are journalists killed in Afghanistan. It is a risky job - there are some journalists who are in danger - even in other developed parts of the world, and if it can happen there, it's obvious that these things can very easily happen to journalists in Afghanistan. You want to be a voice for the people, and it's dangerous, but you still have to keep doing your job. Sometimes, we can't really talk about sensitive topics, like religion or politics. It could put your life in danger. I think everyone has to think about their own safety.

There are a lot of untold stories. Some are the stories everybody can tell, they don't harm anyone, but no one has thought about as important. Then, there are the hard stories to tell, that could be risky.

For example, the Afghanistan government lost more than 45,000 soldiers in five years. Imagine if one in every five would have a family or kids. It would be a very heart touching story if a journalist would go and talk about the life of that family, what do they face? How is life for them? Are they supported?

Some of the harder stories can really put a journalist's life in danger. I think in that case the story needs to be told in a different way. I know it's hard, but these stories need to be told.

Peak Leadership is a FREE extra-curricular program designed to give BCIT students the opportunity to learn leadership and professional development through professional sessions, practical leadership experience and self-discovery. This flexible program runs from October 2018 to April, and applications are open until late September, 2019. They accept 100 students into the program each year.



The Interactive Art of Enclosure

words Ali Pitargue

B.C.-based conceptual artist Mowry Baden uses perceptual psychology, science, and architecture to engage viewers to participate in his art. The Vancouver Art Gallery is featuring a 15-piece exhibition of his works that will run until June 9th, 2019.

"Have any of you danced with a mop bucket?" asked Mowry Baden, standing before a small crowd of journalists touring his Vancouver Art Gallery exhibit. He was introducing his 2015 sculpture, Trisector—a stainless-steel carousel with mop buckets attached on three edges; the work can be described as 'part playground, part industrial device', occupying almost an entire room in the gallery.

"It's a serious question," he quipped. Baden—a retired art professor at the University of Victoria—scanned the room as if he was assessing a lecture hall of freshmen on their first day of class. "There's one hand. Two. Three! Good."

He shrugged. "Mop buckets have four wheels. If you get the water out of it, it becomes very mobile. Put a mop in and it makes for a great dance partner."

Baden walked up to one of the buckets and gave it a light knock. It clanged. The bucket is actually made of bronze. It's heavy and difficult to spin around the carousel. These buckets don't dance.

Interacting with Trisector was a strenuous exercise, and this was the case for plenty of Baden's works on display at the gallery. At a glance, it gives you the impression of being playful, but once you get up close, it induces stress and unease. The art's concept is intrinsic in the viewer's struggle. Aesthetics and pleasure be damned.

Baden's work aims to invoke what he calls a 'perceptual crisis'. He intends to compromise the viewer's reliance on their sense of vision. This necessitates active participation on the viewer's part, as well as stepping into an enclosure created by the art. What many spectators may dismiss as everyday objects like mop buckets are actually not what they seem. Once you are led to enter the art's enclosed space, Baden encourages you to summon your impulse to touch and hear. And often, the experience is unpleasant.

The Visual Malaise of Conceptual Art

The first floor of the Vancouver Art Gallery is usually reserved for specialty exhibits that are considered the venue's main attraction. This year, art history junkies all over Vancouver are scouring the VAG to get a glimpse of the masters—Claude Monet, Henri Matisse, Auguste Rodin, and more from the radical band of French modernists selected for the presentation. Their visually-dazzling works are first to greet you as you enter the facility.

Second on the VAG bill is an exhibit from Governor General's Award-winner Mowry Baden, this season's artist showcase. When you ascend the stairs to the next floor, you will likely find yourself underwhelmed by what you see. It would require you to shift gears from soaking in Monet's vibrant pastel colours, to getting displaced by the industrial ambience of Baden's sculptures. From a distance, it's as if Baden had scoured the back-alley of an abandoned factory and mashed some scraps together. Mechanical contraptions, cheap mattresses, and a giant wooden box—it makes for a dull sight.

But Mowry Baden's art does not care about your sight. In fact, the less you rely on your sight, the better. Baden is not only more concerned about triggering your other senses, but in order to truly engage with his art, he requires you to stop believing everything that you see.

Mowry Baden's art devalues the role of the idle spectator. Instead, he attempts to stimulate the viewer psychologically by inviting them to interact with his work. He maps out an experience for the participant, and as a result, it elicits impressions that are more defined by what the viewer thought or felt, than what they saw.

"The value of the work lies in its potential to disrupt," says Grant Arnold, the curator of Baden's exhibit. "Even if very subtly and for a brief period of time, the habitual perceptions and misconceptions that shape the way we understand ourselves and our place in the world."

Such is the case with most conceptual art. While previous artistic movements aim to invoke visual awe, conceptual art is more nonchalant about 'wow' factors. Renaissance and romanticist art movements place great importance on the splendor and grandeur of a depicted scene, often designed to grab you at first sight. Conceptual art, on the other hand, cannot be appreciated just by a fleeting glance. The subjective nature of art prevents contemporary pieces from being elevated on visuals alone. The idea and concept of the piece takes precedence, and that requires deep contemplation.

For this, we can thank a key influence of Baden's, the French artist Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp helped pioneer the Dadaist movement—an artistic wave that sheds light on all kinds of nonsensical phenomena in the modern world. In the 1910s, Duchamp launched a series of works that set art critics aghast in the early 20th century; he called these works the Readymades.

With his Readymades, Duchamp took mass-produced, ordinary objects and elevated them on a pedestal. He would take a bicycle wheel, mount it on a wooden stool, and call it art just because he liked watching a wheel spin in one place. And most notoriously, in 1917's Fountain, he turned a men's urinal on its back and signed it himself with a false name. With this in mind,

we could say that Duchamp is the ultimate poster-child for detractors of contemporary art, particularly those who dismiss it as conceptual hogwash. Otherwise, Duchamp argued that everyday objects can become art as a result of an artist's intent to reposition and re-modify them. He said that this is an antidote to simplistic art trends that aimed to showcase purely 'retinal art'.

Whether or not you subscribe to Duchamp's philosophy, plenty still have, and numerous successors piggy-backed off his ideas. Mowry Baden is one, and he takes it one step further. Visually banal, the effectiveness of Baden's art hinges on integrating multiple senses and encouraging interactivity.

"The use of common materials and found objects tends to counter the conceptions of genius and mastery that are often tied to the production of art," explains Arnold. "The familiarity of these materials can also be a way of drawing the viewer into the work."

The most recent of Baden's works is a small mechanical installation entitled *Shingle Beach*. A metal handle is affixed awkwardly on a black, circular disk that causes it to travel on top of a steel platform. When the disk moves, it creates a sound reminiscent of waves crashing on a shingle (or pebble) beach, hence its title.

Like Duchamp's *Readymades*, *Shingle Beach* is composed of mass-produced industrial scraps. Interestingly, its handlebars are stabilized by what are commonly called 'suicide knobs'. These now-recalled suicide knobs were formerly used for one-handed steering of an automobile. The knob is placed on top of a car's steering wheel, but they became lethal when drivers' clothing started getting caught in them, obstructing the driver's ability to maneuver the car.

However, it is worthy to note how the physical representation of the object alludes to a deadly hazard, but the sound it creates evokes calming memories. Baden musters a sensory dissonance between sight, touch, and hearing.

"There's no instrumental logic to what you're doing," says Grant Arnold. "[*Shingle Beach*] is an experience that might exist for itself. It's not something that has a beginning or an end, where it takes you from one point

to another point and achieves a particular goal. It just is." Machines are constructed with a desired purpose. They are carefully blueprinted to produce some sort of output to improve a process. Baden, in contrast, built a machine that serves no utilitarian value. The only purpose to it is to make your senses clash, and in the end, it produces an experience.

The Enclosed State of Mind

Above all else, Baden aims to summon an individual experience in the viewer. In particular, he attempts to invoke a feeling of enclosure, or the feeling of being en-wrapped by a defined space. In architecture, 'enclosure' is synonymous with the slang term, 'building envelope'—it refers to any structure in a building that separates internal from external space.

"I'm the son of an architect, and I'm the father of one," Baden tells the crowd. "So architecture runs deep in the family. Not surprising that I get [the skill], and that so many of my works involve this. To make a private space—you could make a work that shelters or shields."

Alongside *Trisector*, the other centerpiece of the Baden exhibition is called *Ukulele*. A separate room at the edge of the gallery space is dedicated to the installation, but the room could not contain the cacophonous sound of ping pong balls bouncing off its walls. Baden titled this piece "*Ukulele*" because of this. The sound the structure makes bears resemblance to a ukulele his parents gave him as a child; the ping pong balls hitting the facade sounded like tapping the body of a small guitar.

As you enter to viewing space, you encounter a large wooden box where participants can step inside. What you will be pleased to find is how the interior of this unsightly crate is the closest thing the exhibit has to a visual feast.

As you enter the box, you step into the darkened room and the inside seems more massive than how it looked from the outside. Steadily, you make your way across a narrow walkway, where you rely on your sense of touch to feel the railings. The only light source comes from a projector emitting polka-dotted rays on the walls.

"Then ping pong balls kind of come shooting out from the darkness towards you," explains Grant Arnold.

"They won't actually hit you, but it's a little bit like being in outer space and watching comets and meteors fly by you. You'll actually have a fairly instinctual response, flinching every once and a while, but you know they're not going to hit you."

For the viewer, this provokes a form of kinesthesia, or an awareness of one's body position and movement. This kinesthesia is enhanced if the viewer is in a state of enclosure, both physically and mentally. For *Uku-lele*, the space allotted for your enclosed state is larger than what the viewer would presume. This would have required a willingness to interact, and in doing so, the art activates the viewer's other senses in supplement to their sight being overwhelmed. This exercise cancels out preconceived notions of what was inside the wooden box.

Other Baden works in the exhibit draw upon the theme of enclosure. Most notably, *Cheap Sleeps Columbine* and *Marsupial* work to cocoon the viewer in an enclosed space. The enclosure, in these cases, is a form of refuge.

Overall, this kind of practice argues that in order to maximize one's propensity to consume art, it would be better to do so in an isolated and meditative state of mind.

Concept Over Aesthetic

Culture critic Morse Peckham once said: "A work of art is any perceptual field which an individual uses an occasion for performing the role of art perceiver." With a piece like *Trisector*, the viewer not only assumes the role of an art perceiver, but their participation is integral to its effectiveness. They approach the mop bucket with an intent to dance with it, where they assume total control over an everyday object, but it turns out the object is more intimidating than they thought. They realize an object's true value and fortitude through an anticlimactic way that strips them of pleasure.

The provocation of discomfort and confusion is the bread and butter of Mowry Baden's art. Similarly to his predecessors like Marcel Duchamp, he rejects tradition of aesthetic impression (or "retinal art" as Duchamp aptly worded it). There are plenty of naysayers that scoff upon the mental gymnastics required to consume contemporary art, but the absence of visual niceties opens

up an alternative trajectory that is just as philosophically-salient. In contemporary artistic eras, visuals don't cut it anymore. Artists these days stand out because they allow the concept to wield the intent of their art.



Mowry Baden
Trisector, 2015
bronze, rubber, stainless steel
Courtesy of the Artist
Photo: Mark Alldritt

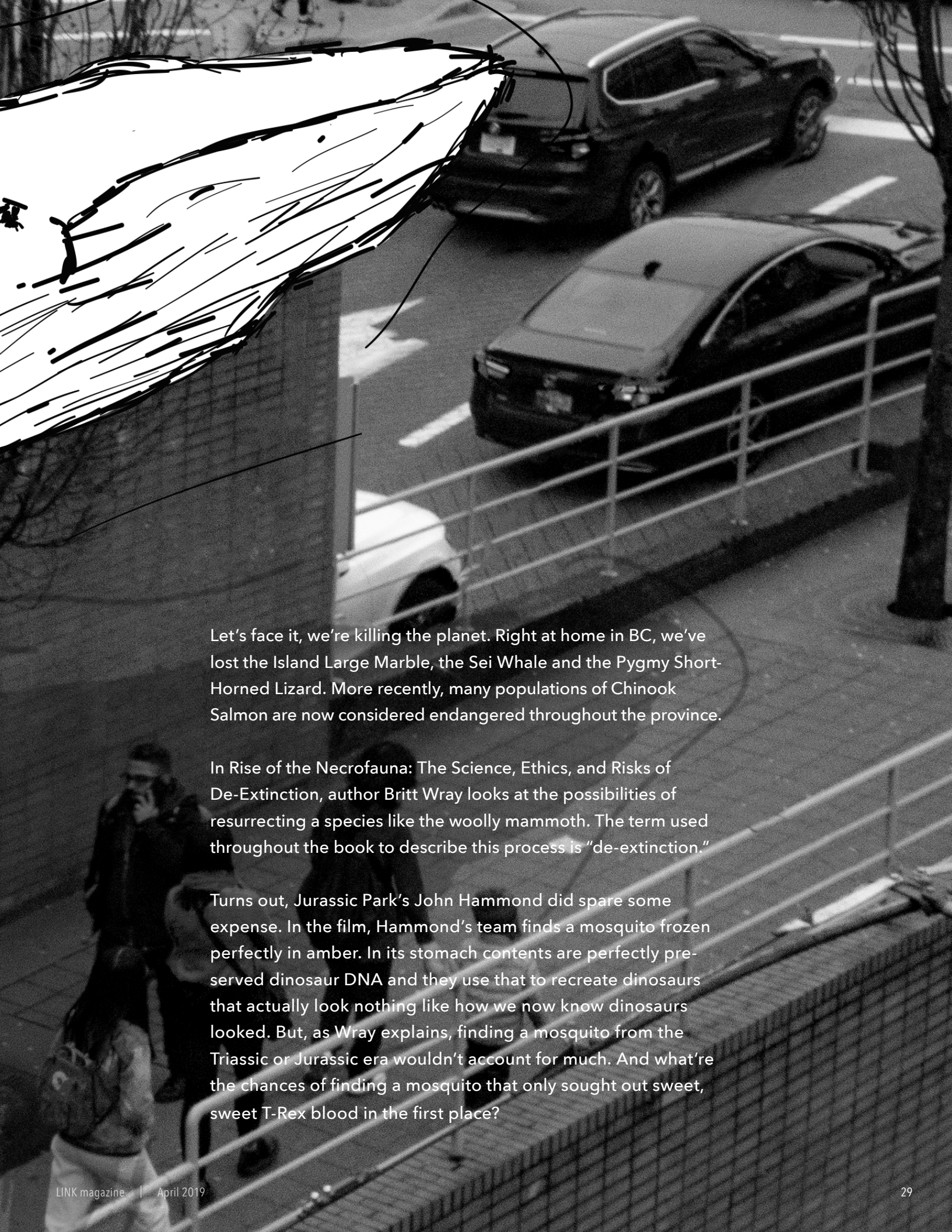


Mowry Baden
Tachycardia, 2016
rubber, stainless steel
Collection of Robert Youds
and Christine Toller
Photo: Mark Alldritt

*Blue Whale, listed by the
World Wildlife Fund as
endangered.*

De-Extinction

words **Sean Murphy**
illustration **Efren Arriesgado**



Let's face it, we're killing the planet. Right at home in BC, we've lost the Island Large Marble, the Sei Whale and the Pygmy Short-Horned Lizard. More recently, many populations of Chinook Salmon are now considered endangered throughout the province.

In *Rise of the Necrofauna: The Science, Ethics, and Risks of De-Extinction*, author Britt Wray looks at the possibilities of resurrecting a species like the woolly mammoth. The term used throughout the book to describe this process is "de-extinction."

Turns out, Jurassic Park's John Hammond did spare some expense. In the film, Hammond's team finds a mosquito frozen perfectly in amber. In its stomach contents are perfectly preserved dinosaur DNA and they use that to recreate dinosaurs that actually look nothing like how we now know dinosaurs looked. But, as Wray explains, finding a mosquito from the Triassic or Jurassic era wouldn't account for much. And what're the chances of finding a mosquito that only sought out sweet, sweet T-Rex blood in the first place?

That leads us to the work of Dr. George M. Church. His work with Harvard University is to “proxy” the mammoth using CRISPR genome technology. Instead of trying to turn ancient mosquito blood into a living, breathing woolly mammoth, they’re looking at altering existing Asian elephant DNA from mammoth soft tissue stored in the permafrost. They’ve successfully spliced the two together and are now attempting to turn the hybrid skin cells into an embryo that can grow in an artificial womb. That’s the real challenge.

Church states, “Just making a DNA change isn’t that meaningful. We want to read out the phenotypes.” Phenotypes are the observable traits of an organism, which need to be understood properly to create that embryo. If that’s possible - and if they’re successful - where in the world do we put a herd of mammoths?

Jurassic Park?

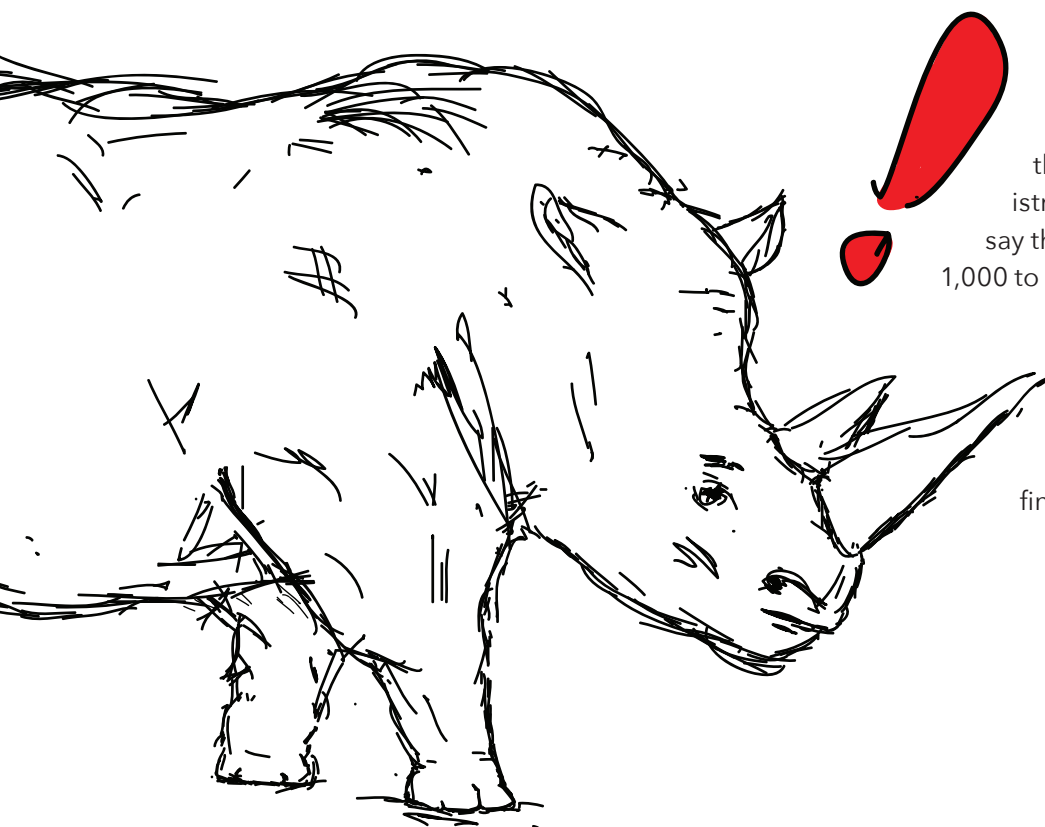
What about a Last Glacial Maximum Park?

In 1988, Russian scientist Sergey Zimov founded Pleistocene Park, a nature reserve intended to replicate the “mammoth steppe” –Earth’s most extensive biome

that flourished during the last glacial period. It had high-productivity grasses, willow shrubs and herbs. It was home to horse, bison, and –you guessed it –mammoths. Animals currently in the park range from reindeer to red foxes, but Zimov hopes to one day harbour herds of woolly mammoth there. He believes that the landscape in Siberia only changed once the mammoths left and reintegrating them would drastically alter the surrounding area to create a grassland ecosystem. In an interview with BBC News, he’s quoted as saying, “The animals, their hooves, they disturb the moss and let grasses grow instead. The soil dries out, the animals deposit their fertilizer, the grass grows more, and more animals can graze.”

Zimov’s concept was listed as one of Project Drawdown’s “100 most substantive solutions to global warming.”

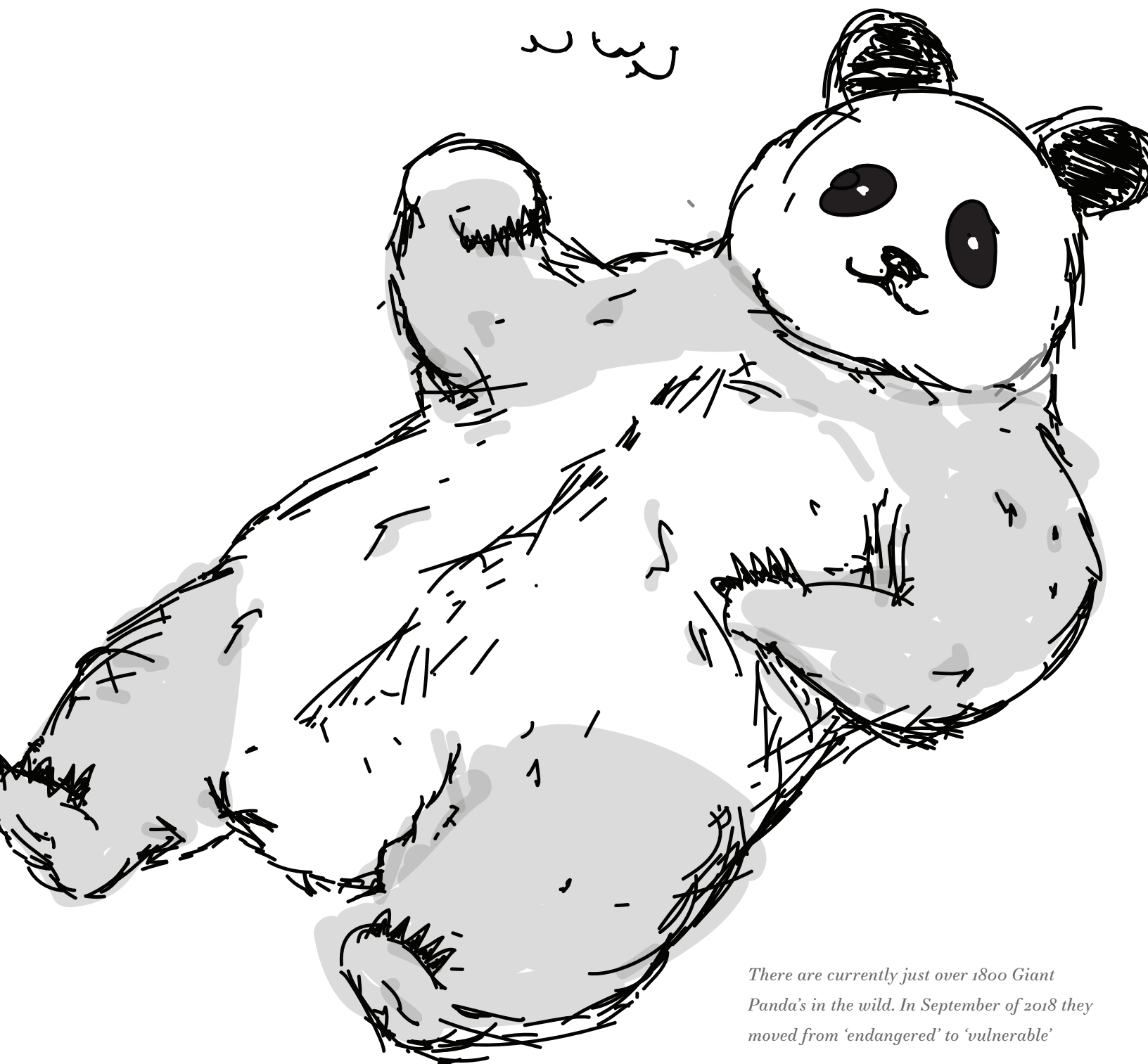
Thomas Van Dooren, Australian leading philosopher of extinction studies, is more cautious about the ethics of de-extinction. “Given the current context, as we’re letting endangered species go extinct, resurrecting them doesn’t represent the beginning of a new ethical relationship with them. It could just begin another phase of extinction for them”



Extinction is a natural process. Since the Cambrian period (590 million years ago), about two species disappear from the planet annually, according to the Conservation Data Centre at the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks. They say that number could be anywhere from 1,000 to 10,000 times higher now.

Extinction used to be forever, but maybe it doesn’t have to be.

To quote Dr. Ian Malcolm, “Life will, uh, find a way.”



There are currently just over 1800 Giant Panda's in the wild. In September of 2018 they moved from 'endangered' to 'vulnerable'



*The Nubian giraffe was listed as
critically endangered in 2018*



*The Sumatran orangutan has been listed as
critically endangered since 2008*



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