

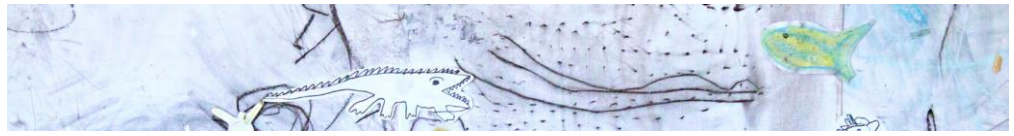
Dwelling with Departure: Honouring Bird Death

Lived with, the children and educators of the “Oak” Room

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Dwelling with Departure: Honouring Bird Death

A beautiful fall morning calls us to walk. With woven baskets swinging tenderly by our sides, some children from Oak room and I set out to collect fallen leaves and stones, and other worldly treasures that capture our attention this time of year. Along our way, the faint sound of music beckons us. In a pursuit to find its origins we are lured to walk along a narrow pathway adjacent to the Fir building, where large glass windows invite us to peer through. At first, we are distracted by the sights and sounds of music being made and we almost fail to recognize the presence of another being here with us. As the children move within this space, they soon come to notice the body of a bird (what we have later come to know as a female Varied Thrush) lying still on the ground, her silent beauty drawing us closer. We gather around the bird's body and the children grapple to make sense of what is happening:

Liam: **“He got owies. He’s sleeping”**

They eagerly call out to the bird, attempting to wake her up.

Liam: **“Cock-a-doodle-doo... wake up time!”**

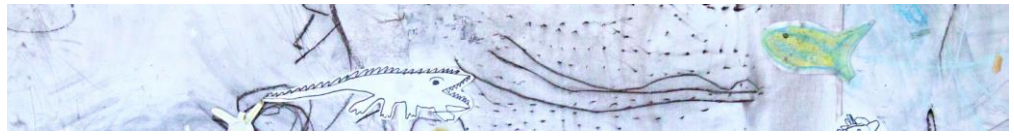
Children together: **“Wakey wakey... wakey wakey”**

Liam: **“He’s still sleeping. I’m sad he’s not waking up”**

Conan: **“But look at his eyes. He has an owie in it.”**



Image 1



Their concern and curiosity towards the bird is insistent and we wonder what we can do in this moment to respond. Clutching our baskets, our fingers reach towards the leaves and stones laying inside. We feel compelled to protect the bird, in hopes that her peaceful slumber won't be disturbed. We gently place our collection of treasures around the body creating a vibrant circle of affection. Our care-full-ness provokes further discussion.

Goldie: **“Why does it be dead forever?”**

Liam: **“He’s sleeping... Wake up!”**

Conan: **“Shoo shooo wake up!”**

Goldie: **“He’s not going. Maybe he lies there forever?”**

Conan: **“Somebody better rescue it.”**

Liam: **“Who can rescue it? A doctor!”**

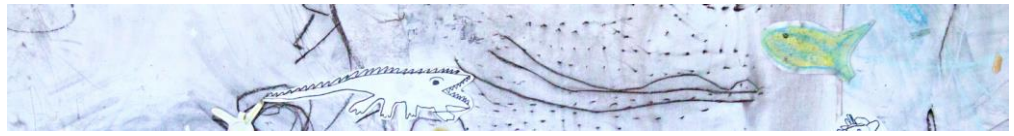
Conan: **“That’s sad. Maybe it’s a pet? Maybe somebody dropped it?”**

Goldie: **“Why? Why is that bird dead? Maybe he got killed? Maybe he got lost? His feathers can’t fly anymore.”**



Image 2

Our circle is complete,
yet we are disrupted by a heaviness and doubt
as we make our way back to the center.



Visiting the Thrush becomes a daily ritual. Rain or shine, our eagerness to see what has become of her gathers us in wonderment as we marvel at her changing form.

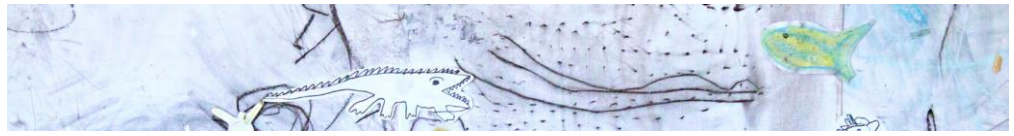
Liam affectionately offers his sentiment, an evocative eulogy that feels respectful to our growing relationship with this bird.

Liam (age 4): **“Dead bird. He was flying fast, but now his eyes are closed”**

As we continue to frequent this space, we wonder how we might encourage our presence, and the presence of this bird, to become visible to others? We decide to laminate and leave the children’s initial grappling’s and Liam’s eulogy next to the body, so that whoever encounters them know that this bird, and this place, matters to us. Our care and reverence palpable for those whose curiosities provoke them to dwell here. The bird persistently lingers on our minds as we continue to gather; longing to respectfully honour this waning figure as her presence becomes more and more amplified. (Images 3 & 4)



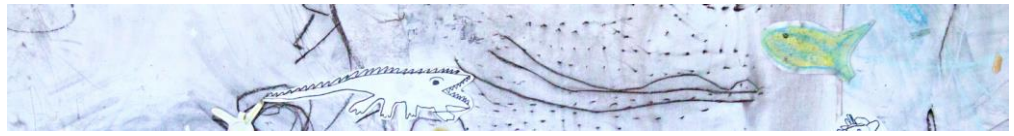
Image 3 and 4 (Photo credit Briony Taylor)



Days turn into weeks; the circular stone border thickens and so does a blanket of leaves covering and surrounding the body. Others have been here too. We are somewhat astonished that after so much time her body is still here; yet to be disturbed or removed by other animals or those who tend to the campus grounds. Fresh leaves and foliage accumulate, growing more and more vibrant every day. We notice university students and children from other rooms at the centre visiting too. Individually and collectively coming together to pay our respect.



Images 5 and 6



Our sustained commitment of thoughtful attention leads to an awareness of other and multiple bird bodies, often laying close to the edges of the buildings. We tend to these bodies in similar, yet quieter, ways. Hoping that our attentiveness might hinder our capacity to ignore or allow the lifeworld's of these birds to vanish in a puff of feathers.



Image 7

Artist Bio

Sarah Peden is an early childhood educator at Capilano Universities Children's Centre and is in her final semester of studies for the completion of a bachelor's degree in ECCE. She is the mother of a busy two-year-old who keeps her on her toes when she isn't working and engaging with her studies. Passionate about exploring possibilities for responding ethically and responsibly to our ever-changing world with young children, she seeks to bring into presence the vibrancy of our multiple human and more-than-human relationalities.