

# LIFE IN COLOUR

## Exploring the Natural World through Exhibition

**Life in Colour** is an interactive exhibition exploring the natural world and interconnectedness of life. Black-and-white vinyl murals eight feet high and 40 feet long immerse visitors in different ecosystems through the act of colouring. The illustrations were developed by artist Angela Gooliaff in coordination with the exhibits and curatorial teams at the Beaty Biodiversity Museum. This collaboration even extended to Hemlock Printers, a local and sustainability-minded company who printed the murals.

With minimal wording, this exhibition's message is conveyed almost entirely through illustration and active engagement. This decision was consciously made to ensure the exhibition is as inclusive and accessible as possible. Through the deliberate removal of text, the audience is wider than a traditional exhibition, including non-English speakers, those with reading impairments, and visitors who are not yet of reading age. The bottoms of the wall murals are positioned only six inches off the floor to facilitate colouring regardless of visitor height, and the murals are accessible to wheelchair and other mobility device users.

For many visitors and indeed exhibition curators, there is a separation between the display object and the

text panel that accompanies it. Here, the project took the innovative approach of removing these traditional panels and provided a space where visitors can interact directly with scientific content to drive the journey of exploration. The exhibition took a creative lens to the introduction, biography and acknowledgements panels by making them fully colourable and interactive. Where another exhibition might have “do not touch” signs, *Life in Colour* created “please colour” signs and are pleased to report that even these signs have been well-coloured by visitors.

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Observation of visitor interactions invites exciting thoughts about how future exhibitions might progress. The project's topic is complex and scientific, but by offering minimal text information and simply inspiring and enabling visitors to interact with artwork and create their own story, the project is facilitating discussion, learning and engagement in a way that was not anticipated.

The meditative quality of colouring has led to some exciting situations: friends, families, groups, couples, and even strangers coloured side-by-side and discuss the species they are colouring, their process of colouring, or simply talk about their day. By not directing peoples' experiences and instead providing a place for people to relax socially, the project found the modern-day equivalent of the quilting circle or sewing bee. One of the Beaty Biodiversity Museum's interpreters said of her experience closing the exhibition at the end of the day, “this is the first time I've had to kick people out of the Museum”, and isn't that a vision for all museums for the future?



(Onchorhynchus spp.) comes from the krill and shrimp they eat.

Grizzly bears (Ursus

### **Project Organizers:**

Yukiko Stranger-Galey is the Exhibits & Design Manager for the Beaty Biodiversity Museum.

Angela Gooliaff first worked in a Toxicology laboratory and she returned to study art and design at Emily Carr University.

Derek Tan is the Digital Media Specialist for the Beaty Biodiversity Museum and has worked in collections and on public engagement in museums for over a decade.

Lesha Koop is a metal fabricator and sculptor, working as the mount maker at the Beaty Biodiversity Museum since 2010.

Haseenah Molumo is a UBC student in Computer Science and Business. Her expertise and work in design and marketing.

**Photo:** Mural representing terrestrial ecosystems.  
Photo credit: Derek Tan