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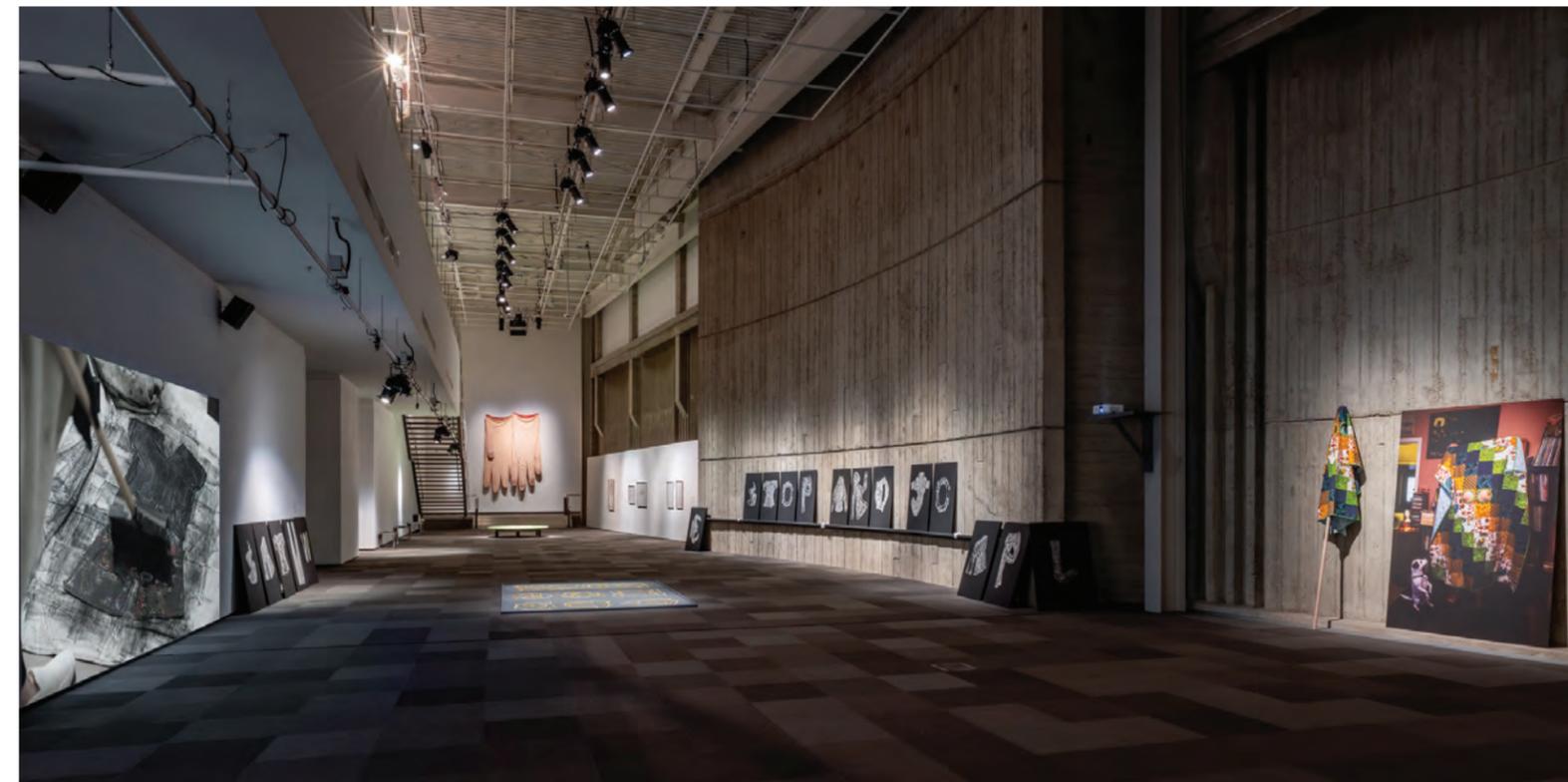
Why don't you...

YVONNE MULLOCK

Main Gallery
Nickle Galleries | University of Calgary
February 6 - April 30, 2026

Yvonne Mullock's exhibition *Why don't you...* is a solo presentation that brings together multiple projects spanning more than ten years of the artist's practice. Beginning with printmaking and extending into textiles, video, ceramics, and bronze, Mullock crosses disciplinary boundaries to explore embodied experiences of the world. Many of the works engage with clothing as material culture, uncovering the histories, habits, and traces of the body in ways that are often surprising, humorous, and revealing. With a keen interest in bodily propriety, discomfort, and privacy, Mullock invites us into intimate spaces—always with a playful touch.

Mullock's practice interrogates iconic symbols of dominant culture, such as the Stetson hat, while creating space for underrepresented perspectives to participate in these cultural narratives. Her work frequently incorporates community involvement, embodiment, and elements of performance, adding multidimensionality to a practice that values process as much as outcome. Ultimately, Mullock's work reinforces that the boundaries between high and low art, fine art and craft, are outdated—and that working within these blurred spaces generates rich and insightful artistic inquiry.



Secret Cords

Ana Harbec

Other lessons were impressed upon me even more deeply. I heard of...brother, sister, and all the various relationships which bind one human being to another in mutual bonds.

—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

The first cord

Take and give, there are 8,231,613,073 people currently alive on this planet. It's an expectedly difficult and existential exercise to be precise in this matter though, as each stroke of my keys here marks death, marks birth. Click, clack: the shuddering, cosmic interchange between worlds, arrivals and departures running side by side. I need you to think about how each of these 8.231 billion living humans was fed life's first nutrients through a cord, which upon birth, is cut. An invisible one lingers *in absentia* however: an entanglement as primordial as the soup from which all life hypothetically sprung forth. That a mother's body furnishes the necessary building blocks for an entire human to form is both remarkable and a common piece of knowledge—well-worn like an old hand-me-down sweater or favourite pair of be-holed socks, or tarnished but beloved panties. Yet, researchers have recently discovered that the exchange goes both ways: baby's cells sneak into mom's body by that life-giving cord, and travel around, literally fixing physically broken hearts and doing other benevolent work. If you have siblings, it's possible that your cells and theirs are still comingling in your mother's body. If you have older siblings, it's possible that some of their cells are likewise ambling around inside you, or vice versa. Stay with me here: I'm trying to show you how, throughout the whole of creation, we are all bound by secret cords, silvered and trembling, scarlet and pulsing, red and magnetic, invisible and vibrating.

Blood harmony

Yvonne Mullock's multipronged work *Harmonia* includes an exquisite garment: quilted and dyed using fungi, which the artist procured through bartering within mushroom foraging communities, the two-person robe was modelled after Iron Age bog blouses and a pattern from Jean Ray Laury's "Quilted Clothing," and was designed specifically for siblings to wear in tandem. *Harmonia* was conceived of by the artist in the twilight-stained space of mourning the ineffable loss of her own sibling—a way to grasp the fine and fading filaments of one beloved. The robe's bleeding, loamy tones of brackish green, tender pink, and sunny, warm yellows and oranges are the result of dyes made of polypores, lobsters, and hydrellums, from recipes found in Miriam C. Rice's "Mushrooms for Color." One of the garment's most striking features however, is the shared sleeve that connects the two otherwise discrete robes: a sartorial cord between siblings.

Mullock cites Pythagorean principles of nature's divine order—otherwise known as the music of the spheres, *musica universalis*, or, I might suggest, Pythagoras' secret *chords*—as the inspiration for the title of this work. Yet, the terrene stuff of *Harmonia* and her seemingly disparate artistic interests at large—the sprawling

world of fungi, histories of costume and dress, the resplendence of decay and regeneration, the Bauhaus school, communal forms of making, Bernard Rudofsky's iconoclastic critiques of fashion and modernity, the vagaries of the human body, Surrealism, imprints and residues, the Ballets Russes, warp and weft, life and death—are anything but easily parsed and ordered. Instead, her interests seem to elude classification and are perhaps more connected than appears at first look. Things, after all, are not always what they seem.

Mullock has worked with mushrooms as artistic fodder for well over a decade; her early collage works, *Mushrooms of North America/Vogue* from 2013, which literally pop up in the *Harmonia* catalogue, are a whimsical arrangement of elegant and modestly bejewelled hands (sometimes with arms), decontextualized and incised from their concomitant humans. The limbs are collaged to delicately grasp the spongy, elongated trunks and supple, moist, and sometimes gilled heads of various species of mushroom. I think of these works as a leitmotif for her practice at large, regarding both *what* she's interested in, and *how* she creates. The former—her artistic predilections—can quite aptly be described as a "nostalgie de la boue," a longing for the vernal mud, the fertile dirt from which such fungal tendrils sprout and creep: an enduring preoccupation with the crude, the vulgar, the taboo, the wryly perverted. Throughout Mullock's oeuvre though, such depraved things are drawn forth playfully, usually in bright colours, as an invitation for all of us to step over the threshold into her world and become enfolded into the joke, into the ruse, the punchline, the levity, the joy, the abandon. They say the best comedians reckon with the most existential of subjects.

Regarding the latter—how the artist creates—fungi and their connective symbiosis can just as fittingly serve as a blueprint for Mullock's methodology. Many of the artist's projects are foregrounded by an embedded, communal approach to creating. Across diverse projects, Mullock has worked alongside and engaged the expertise of a broad range of individuals and communities—Western hat makers, children and babies, horticulturists, horses, mycology societies, fellow artists, architects, rug hooking guilds, chefs, musicians, and quilters, to name a few—to create works that speak to her chosen specific histories, geographies, and processes.

To make, Mullock becomes part of an ecosystem, unspooling the very idea of the lone artist. "We' are ecosystems that span boundaries and transgress categories. Our selves emerge from a complex tangle of relationships only now becoming known," writes Merlin Sheldrake of the utterly dizzying reality that fungi impress upon us, a reality that dissolves the idea of a discrete self, replacing it instead with a complex tangle of connections that begets the query: where do I end, and you begin? This query is materially impelled by the adjoined sleeves of Mullock's *Harmonia* garment and many, if not all, of her other projects. In *Dark Horse*, for example, the artist collaborated with a proud and patrician Arabian named Shere Kaan to create a series of prints from Stetson cowboy hats. Mullock chose and prepared the hats, but it was Shere Kaan and his sheer weight that physically created the prints in a custom-made horse-activated printing press. *Dark Horse*, then, can



and should be understood as an inter-species collaboration and, like all the artist's endeavours, a microcosm for how we as humans are more like pulsating and atomized nebulae, swirling and linked to everything else—our shared constitution as star dust—than lone entities. "There are more bacteria in your gut than stars in our galaxy," Shelldrake writes.

Companion siblings who wear Mullock's *Harmonia* coat will be delighted to discover that upon divesting themselves of it, the garment itself transmutes into a clandestine, purpose-built picnic blanket whose stitching mimics branched mycelium root patterns, mirroring the pulsing fungal hyphae cords that lie beneath the earth the blanket is placed upon. Here, the garment can host a shared meal—chanterelles on toast, king oyster crêpes, truffle deviled eggs, fungi terrine, porcini cannoli—whose digestion will be catalyzed by the 100 trillion microorganisms of the siblings' respective gut microbiota. The word "companion" comes from the Latin for "to share bread with." Among brothers and sisters however, more than bread is shared here: siblings are the single most important determinant of microbiome development and diversity. Kin carry part of one another's flora—bacteria, archaea, and fungi, "old friends," who have evolved symbiotically with humans—within their bodies across the span of their whole lives. Siblings are bound inextricably together, beyond mere flesh or genetic inheritance, beyond death even, by mushrooms: one of the innumerable, invisible ties that bind. The word "cord" comes from the Latin *chorda*, a string on a musical instrument, originally made from the stomach, gut, or intestine—the striking of multiple strings correspondingly makes a chord, a harmony. That siblings share a blood harmony of the stomach, a secret fungal line that enduringly joins them together both upon the spooled thread of our mortal coil and beyond it, is a bona fide example of cosmic consonance: true *harmonia*.

The artist's hand

Mullock's *modus operandi* of working hand-in-glove is no more appropriately illustrated as in *Gift-Love*, a monumental pair of velvet gloves modelled after the artist's own hands. The work references histories of costume and dress, ceremony, pledges, and allegiances—the material story of gloves. *Gift-Love* was made with the expertise of a professional stitcher who reproduced the physiology of Mullock's hands, including knuckle creases, the lines on her palms, and the lunula of her nail beds, as well a dyer, who matched the tones of her skin to the velvet used to construct this piece, creating both a verisimilitude and a strangeness-of-scale that together foreground a surreal, magnetic, reassuring, or perhaps wondrous and whimsical experience for those who encounter the gloves. That the artist's hands are literally rendered here with the expertise of other creators is continuous with Mullock's commitment to collective making and speaks also to the primordial connection we share through the haptic: from hand to hand or hand-me-down.

And just like they say, many hands do really make light work. Though this axiom has scores of applications, the collaborative undertaking of quilt-making is as fine an example as any. While researching local quilting traditions on Fogo Island, a remote isle off the coast of Newfoundland, Mullock embedded herself among the women who hold generations of textile knowledge, rooted in Irish, English, and Welsh traditions of quilting that alchemically combine the practical repurposing of various discarded or thrifted fabrics with repetitive geometric logics.

While conducting her field study, Mullock noticed that often, while showing off their quilts, women would obscure themselves by holding the textiles in front of them, an invisibilizing of the woman that is itself a well-worn motif across history and place. The women on Fogo Island disappearing behind their quilts remind me of Victorian hidden mother photographs, where the maternal figure is shrouded to hold her child or children in front of the camera. It seems the universal *she* is always foregone for the primacy of that which was created by her—quilt or child or any other thing.

In response to this recurring vanishing phenomenon, Mullock created her own set of quilts—a skill learned from the women of the island—and accompanying photographic works entitled *Quilts of Canada*. Yet Mullock's quilting includes a notable intervention: two central peep holes, situated such that when the artist's quilts are held up to be shown off, the holes align perfectly with the breasts—the noteworthy, diverse, beautiful, asymmetrical, singular bosoms—of the woman behind. These peep holes act as portals through which many layers are penetrated—from the viewer in the gallery, to the gallery wall whereon the photographs are hung, through the photograph itself, to the lens of the camera, through the fabric of the blanket, to that which lay beyond: the woman holding the quilt and an acknowledgement of her integral, fecund role, which transcends mere armature, assertively representing instead her provision of the symbolic sustenance of all life.

The repeating motifs of Mullock's quilts are continuous with ancient traditions of quilt patterning; though practical, they are also mandalic and incantatory. Such often-simple tessellations represent the intricate spiritual premise of interconnectedness, eternity, the infinite cycle of life, death, and birth—each station of which quilts have played an integral and humble role since their advent. Quilts to receive newly living, quilts to shroud the dead. Quilts to help the bread rise. Quilts: the hardy and understated surface of life's most workaday and most remarkable moments, patched together in community from disparate pieces, woven of threads so fine and many they cannot be counted. These are the secret cords of women's work, spun from the loom, the womb, the breast, or, from the hands of artists like Mullock, who weave from mere string the connective fabric upon which all of our lives unfurl.

Ω

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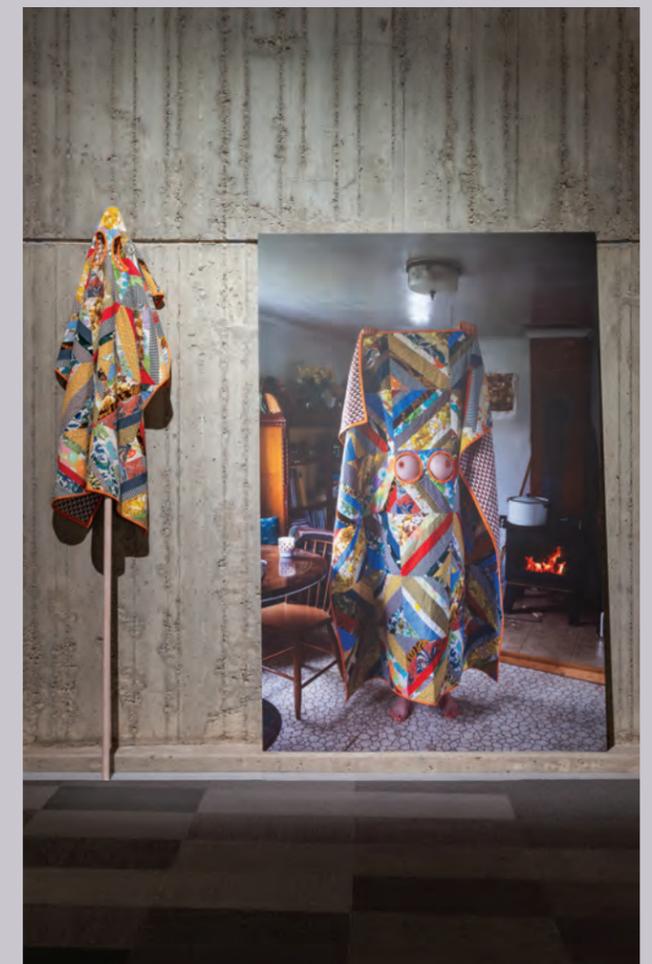
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YVONNE MULLOCK is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice spans textiles, sculpture, video, print, and ceramics. Her work challenges traditional modes of making by incorporating unconventional tools and materials, often engaging audiences through time-based performances and sculptural installations. Recent exhibitions include *PROOFREAD* at the University of Alberta's FAB Gallery (2024), *Harmonia* at The Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre (2021), and *Gift-Love* for the Art Gallery of Alberta's Manning Hall Commission (2019). Her work is held in the permanent collections of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, The Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre, and the Glenbow Museum. Mullock is currently based in Moh'kinstsis / Calgary, Alberta on Treaty 7 territory.



COVER

Gift-Love, 2019 (detail). Custom dyed velvet, silk, lamb leather, thread, wooden hanging mechanism.

PAGE 2

Top:
Gift-Love, 2019. Custom dyed velvet, silk, lamb leather, thread, wooden hanging mechanism.

Bottom:
Shirt as A, 2025. Bronze.

PAGE 3

Top:
Why don't you... (installation view), 2026

Bottom:
Why don't you... (installation view), 2026

PAGE 5

Top:
Harmonia, 2021. Costume; Hand-dyed using funguses *Phaeolus schweinitzii* (Dyer's Polypore), *Hydnellum aurantiacum* (*Hydnellum*), *Hypomyces lactifluorum* (*Lobster*), silk/wool blend twill, woven wool dorr, silk habotai 'paj' (hand-dyed using weld), cotton bias binding, batting, thread, hooks and eyes, mohair tassels and twine, 2 x mannequins - fibreglass, acrylic lacquer spray paint. Video; HD, 4.55 minutes.

Bottom:

Dark Horse, 2016.

Behind, left to right:

Crown Smithbilt open crown 'Boss of the Plains,' Underbrim (diptych). Printed; wool felt hats, ink on paper. Courtesy Norberg Hall. Video, HD 1080p, 16.28 minutes.

Foreground:

Crushed Smithbilt 'Boss of the Plains.' Cast bronze.

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Top:
Proofread, 2024 (installation view). Collograph letters, rag paper adhered to MDF board.

Bottom left:

Pantyhose and Panties, 2022. Screenprint, collagraph, relief print on paper. Courtesy Norberg Hall.

Quilts of Canada, 2013 (detail). Quilted; vintage fabrics, cotton thread, photography.

BACK COVER

could've would've should've, 2021. Rug hooked; artist's clothes, burlap. Collection of Shannon Norberg and Jarvis Hall.

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