

## Animal icons

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'Animal Icons' is an exhibit at the West Van Memorial Library in celebration of Earth Day. The special show, which includes paintings from Robi Smith, runs until April 30. For more info visit [www.westvanlibrary.ca](http://www.westvanlibrary.ca).

*Image by Shannon Harvey*

By [Rebecca Aldous - North Shore Outlook](#)

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The water buffalo were huge.

Their thick horns curled out from the sides of their heads and as they strutted toward Shannon Harvey, slobber dripped from the corners of their dark mouths.

Steadily they moved forward. When the herd finally surrounded Harvey and her friend, one of the buffalo took another step. The black beast lowered its head and, before Harvey or her friend could do anything, it licked their jeans.

“They look scary, but they are so friendly,” Harvey says.

Since last year, the American-born artist has found herself among a multitude of furry, scaled and feathered creatures. It’s part of her research for a series of prints exploring the relationship between humans and animals, in particular the ones we eat. Harvey was inspired by the book *Eating Animals* by Jonathan Safran Foer.

“I wanted to [artistically] depict people who have these close relationships with these animals we so readily eat,” she said, noting her interest included creatures which provide products.

And so she set out. Harvey visited Duncan Martin of Backyard Bounty — a group of independent entrepreneurs developing backyard farming operations. Martin offers workshops and builds henhouses for urban dwellers wanting their own brood.

Harvey also met a herd Belted Galloway cows. These Oreo-striped cattle live on Steveston Stock and Seed Farm in Richmond and are raised antibiotic- and hormone-free to be sold off as beef.

Harvey also met First Nations who showed her how to traditionally prepare salmon for a smoke house.

In the end, not only did Harvey have six prints but a greater appreciation for where food comes from and the people that raise these farm animals.

“I think it has really shown me how important it is to re-connect and re-establish that relationship,” she says.

Harvey studied religious icons before creating the silk screens. She wanted to capture how sacred this connection between farmers and livestock can be. However, the pieces are modern and bold. The only colour in the black and white images is focused on the animals or components of their lives — the red comb of a hen or brown grain for the Galloways.

“[These pieces] are not about preaching and if it gets people talking that is important to me. I want people to think about where their food comes from.”

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