**Carleton University Art Gallery**

**OAAG 2018 Awards**

**Category: Exhibition of the year, budget under $20,000, monographic**

**Curator:** Heather Anderson

**Title:** *Annie Thibault: La chambre des cultures, foraging in time and space*

**Dates:** 11 September – 3 December 2017

**Designer:** Heather Anderson and Annie Thibault

**Coordinator:** Heather Anderson

**Installation:** Patrick Lacasse, Peter Shmelzer, Annie Thibault

**Nomination Defense**

CUAG creates innovative opportunities for contemporary artists to become embedded in academic departments, allowing them to work in interdisciplinary contexts, develop their research and foster the exchange of diverse forms of knowledge. In 2017, we partnered with the Biology Department to pilot a yearlong artist’s residency for Annie Thibault.

Thibault has long worked with fungi as artistic material in laboratories, exploring and revealing the invisible aspects of our world. Where previously she worked with mushrooms—the fruiting bodies of fungi, in Carleton’s biology labs, she collaborated with Dr. Myron Smith to cultivate mycelia, the underground networks through which fungi share information and nutrients.

Over eight months, Thibault and Smith grew mycelia of *Armillaria* (honey mushrooms)and other kinds of fungi. Although this research eventually formed the core of Thibault’s exhibition, it also benefitted Smith, who had long intended to cultivate these specimens in the lab.

Thibault reimagined CUAG as a laboratory, artist’s studio, curiosity cabinet and exhibition space. She presented an installation of mycelia specimens that continued to grow during the exhibition, together with new photographs of the specimens and a video about her lab residency. She also worked in residence at CUAG, making specimen drawings at a custom workbench.

Thibault’s exhibition underscored affinities between creativity and research in scientific and artistic processes. Its title refers to recent scientific experiments on the foraging strategies of mycelial fungi. An apt metaphor for artistic process, foraging encompasses research and experimentation, trial and error, which her exhibition foregrounded in fresh and intriguing ways.

**Exhibited Artist**

**Annie Thibault** lives and works in Gatineau, Québec. She has studied science and art and completed a degree in Visual Art at l’Université du Québec en Outaouais and an MFA at the University of Ottawa. Thibault has received numerous grants, awards and prizes, including the Claudia De Hueck Fellowship in Art and Science, and has held artistic research residencies in biology labs in Canada, Spain and Finland.Thibault has created permanent public art commissions and exhibited her work in Canada, Spain, Finland and the UK. Her work is held in numerous private and public collections including the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

**Image List** All photos by Justin Wonnacott

01 Thibault La chambre des cultures.jpg

Annie Thibault, *La chambre des cultures, foraging in time and space* (2017), photographic document of artist in Department of Biology laboratory, Carleton University

02 Thibault La chambre des cultures.jpg

*Annie Thibault: La chambre des cultures, foraging in time and space* installation view

03 Thibault La chambre des cultures.jpg

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05 Thibault La chambre des cultures.jpg

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06 Thibault La chambre des cultures.jpg

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07 Thibault La chambre des cultures.jpg

*Annie Thibault: La chambre des cultures, foraging in time and space* installation view

08 Thibault La chambre des cultures.jpg

*Annie Thibault: La chambre des cultures, foraging in time and space* installation view

09 Thibault La chambre des cultures.jpg

Annie Thibault looking at Armillaria specimen with magnifying viewer in the exhibition

10 Thibault La chambre des cultures.jpg

Annie Thibault examining specimens displayed in drawers of vintage lab bench in the exhibition

**Technical Outline**

This was CUAG’s first time to embed an artist in a science department at Carleton. Curator Heather Anderson proposed a yearlong residency for Annie Thibault to Dr. Myron Smith, an internationally renowned mycologist. He enthusiastically agreed.

Smith set Thibault up in his lab and procured strains of *Armillaria* from Agriculture Canada. Smith instructed Thibault how to mix nutritive media and inoculate it with the fungi strains in Petri dishes. In her quest to grow large rhizomorphs, Thibault experimented with nutritive media and strategies and consulted with Smith’s students in the lab. Anderson obtained additional *Armillaria* strains from the University of Toronto and tips from leading fungal researcher Dr. Lynne Boddy at the Cardiff School of Biosciences in Wales. Thibault waited patiently for results, and through trial and error, was most successful with *Armillaria* *gallica* strain445-3.

Thibault was ever aware that she was collaborating with intelligent, agential organisms and could not control results. CUAG ordered custom Plexi boxes to enable her to experiment on a larger scale. Working with these proved challenging: other unintended organisms “invaded” the boxes, enabling Thibault to observe how *Armillaria gallica* fended off other species. These results became central to the exhibition.

Thibault worked with fellow artist Justin Wonnacott to produce striking photographs of the specimens and wall-size vinyl murals that created a laboratory mise-en-scène in the gallery. Thibault displayed large specimens on custom metal and glass tables and enhanced the lab atmosphere by procuring a vintage lab bench that held additional specimens in drawers for visitors to discover and examine with a vintage magnifying viewer.