

"Refugia" weekend: Invite from the Gabriola Island Fibreshed Working Group

In the spirit of generosity and investigation, the Gabriola Island Fibreshed Working Group (GIFWG) will present "Refugia", an interdisciplinary arts and science event, from November 15 to 17. Against a backdrop of political extremism and climate emergency, we seek a pocket of time and space in which we can find solace and renewal in our creative practice.

Bringing together textile makers, visual artists, musicians, poets, and scientists, "Refugia" will feature a textile installation by Barbara Adler, including a "Slow Social" evening of sound, readings, and cordage making; a talk by biologist Dr. Lynne Quarmby (also to be found upstairs at Nova reading Science Tarot); and the world premiere of the composition Typha, played on cattail fibres, by Matt Rogalsky and Laura Jean Cameron. The Gabriola Microsynth Orchestra will perform, as well as the loomcore duo Thrums. And there are some special guests!

In the middle of this swirl of art forms we will be making cordage, which will give participants a sense of what goes into the spinning of fibre, from the finest thread to the thickest rope. Earlier this year, the GIFWG hosted Fashion Fictions, a Gabriola 2050 event imagining what our island's textile future could look like. One of the ideas that came forward was how necessary rope is to so many things in our lives: what if Gabriola was to become self-sufficient in meeting our rope needs? During "Refugia", we will playfully enact a version of this scenario, using just our hands and natural fibre grown on the island.

In biology, a refugium is a reservoir of sorts—a space, often isolated, that at once protects and nurtures, shelters and cultivates. A refugium is a sign that something has gone wrong. Sometimes it's used to describe a pocket of habitat that allows an endangered species to endure and even recover. In the context of our changing planet, refugia might be found in places where species have migrated to escape evolving conditions in their original range, or a space within that range that, for whatever reason, has been shielded from change. A refugium is related to but not the same as a refuge, however. Refugia are not utopias. They're not necessarily reliably safe. They're almost by definition temporary. They're not a place to hide for very long; they're a place where work gets done.