

# Notched Bodies: Insects in Contemporary Art

The Arsenal Gallery

September 13 – November 13, 2013



NYC Parks



## Notched Bodies: Insects in Contemporary Art

The Arsenal Gallery

September 13 – November 13, 2013

---

Brandon Ballengée, Joianne Bittle, Rebecca Clark, Emilie Clark, Talia Greene, Asuka Hishiki, Julian Montague, Lisa Murch, Julia Oldham, Christy Rupp, Ben Snead  
Curated by Jennifer Lantzas, Public Art Coordinator, NYC Parks

---

*Notched Bodies: Insects in Contemporary Art* features eleven contemporary artists who offer probing personal interpretations on the importance of insects through a variety of media. This exhibition takes its name from ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's classification of insects by their similar traits: six legs and clearly segmented or "notched" bodies. Humans have had a long and complex relationship with insects. Their alien appearance can be jarring or off-putting, but upon closer inspection insects are works of art. They are often seen as pests or invaders; however, their critical role in our ecosystem and daily lives is increasingly clear as urban farming, gardening, and the impact of syndromes like Colony Collapse Disorder become prevalent. Insects are keen indicators of the health of the environment. They help break down and decompose rotting materials, which reintroduces rich nutrients into the soil. They are also the first line of defense against invasive plants and other harmful insects.

Comprising nearly 80% of the species on the planet, the immense diversity among this animal class has provided artists with a wealth of inspiration for centuries. Contemporary artists have been equally enamored with insects for their brilliant colors and forms, unique behaviors, environmental significance, as well as social parallels and cultural commentary. Wasps, beetles, butterflies, cicadas, ants, and crickets are some of the insects examined in the show.

Julian Montague and Talia Greene's works investigate the psychological impact of insects occupying the organized sanctity of home. The detailed renderings of beetles by Joianne Bittle and Ben Snead introduce complex juxtapositions like beauty and revulsion, among others. Emilie Clark, Rebecca Clark, Asuka Hishiki and Christy Rupp examine the impact of insects on the ecosystem. Brandon Ballengée, Julia Oldham and Lisa Murch ask viewers to see beyond insects' unfamiliar, alien appearance and prompt a closer investigation, heralding them as fascinating creatures to be studied, understood and celebrated.



***Love Motel for Insects,*  
2001-ongoing**

Black Ultra-violet lights,  
steel, fabric, invited  
insects

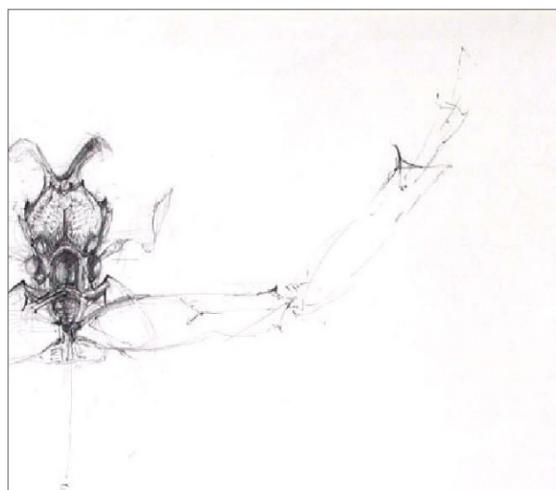
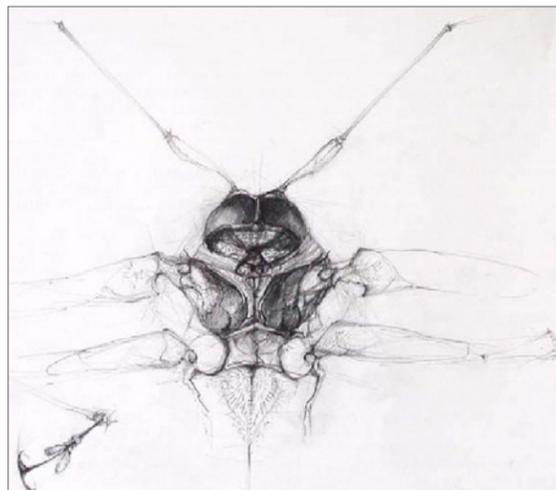
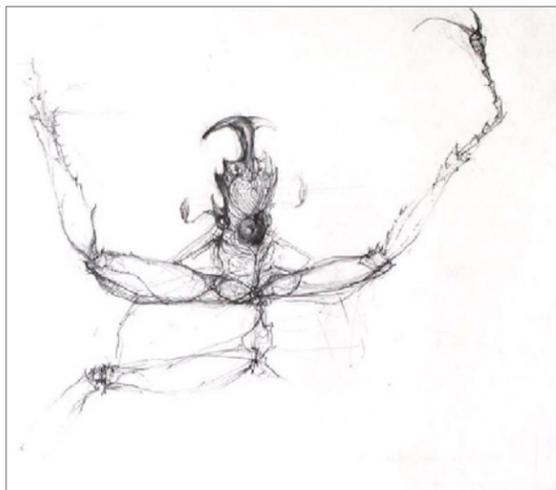
Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and  
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts



## BRANDON BALLENGÉE

Located on the Arsenal lawn, Brandon Ballengée's outdoor light installation initiates interactions between nocturnal insects and humans. Two sets of enlarged dragonfly wings emit a soft blue glow that attracts insects and allows the public to get a more intimate view and greater understanding of our tiny neighbors. His *Love Motels* were born out of an impromptu installation made of black lights and bed sheets in the Costa Rican forest, but have evolved into a series of international exhibitions.



**TOP LEFT:**  
*Dicronorrhina derbyana*  
 (ventral view), 2002  
 Pencil on paper  
 14 x 17 inches  
 Courtesy of the artist

**TOP RIGHT:**  
*Acrocinus longimanus*  
 (ventral view), 2002  
 Pencil on paper  
 14 x 17 inches  
 Courtesy of the artist

**BOTTOM RIGHT:**  
*Goliathus orientalis*  
 (ventral view), 2002  
 Pencil on paper  
 14 x 17 inches  
 Courtesy of the artist

**BOTTOM LEFT:**  
*Dicranocephalus wallichii*  
 (ventral view), 2002  
 Pencil on paper  
 14 x 17 inches  
 Courtesy of the artist



**A Royal Family**  
*(Goliath Beetle)*, 2003  
 Oil and wax on canvas  
 54 x 84 inches  
 Courtesy of the artist

## JOIANNE BITTLE

Joianne Bittle's series *A Royal Family* depicts exotic beetles from around the globe. Her *Goliath Beetle* is removed from his natural surroundings and placed on a gold background, referencing religious icons from the Byzantine era. Enlarged beyond human scale, it is easy to admire the dappled pattern on the beetle's back and the pearly iridescent sheen on his wings. While the armored specimen in Bittle's painting appears timeless, the accompanying smaller drawings turn the insect on its back, exposing the intricate, vulnerable underside and delicately outlined inner workings.



***Bee 4 (look), 2009***  
Graphite on paper  
8.5 x 10.5 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

**OPPOSITE:**  
***Bee 5 (rise), 2009***  
Graphite on paper  
16.5 x 11.5 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

## REBECCA CLARK

Inspired by the natural observations of Albrecht Dürer and other Northern Renaissance artists, Rebecca Clark's highly detailed studies of honeybees are observed in her own backyard. Her graceful bees are both meticulously thorough documentations and lyrical compositions—her bees are symbols of the precarious balance between the natural and industrialized worlds. Clark views her artistic practice as a meditation on natural life cycles, though these cycles are increasingly disturbed in the pursuit of development.



**Untitled, BBG-22 from  
My Garden Pets, 2010**  
Watercolor, ink,  
graphite on paper  
15 x 15 inches  
Courtesy of the  
artist and Morgan  
Lehman Gallery



## EMILIE CLARK

During Emilie Clark's residency at the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens in 2010, she created a series of watercolors that examined the work of underappreciated 19th-century American naturalist Mary Treat. Treat, though an expert in her field and quoted by the likes of Charles Darwin, failed to attain widespread recognition in the scientific community due to gender discrimination. She penned an important study of the symbiotic relationship between insects and plants, which Clark portrays in warm, rich pigments and painterly strokes.

**LEFT:**  
**Untitled, BBG-3 from  
My Garden Pets, 2009**  
Watercolor, ink,  
graphite on paper  
22 x 15 inches  
Courtesy of the  
artist and Morgan  
Lehman Gallery

**MIDDLE:**  
**Untitled, BBG-12 from  
My Garden Pets, 2009**  
Watercolor, ink,  
graphite on paper  
30 x 22 inches  
Courtesy of the  
artist and Morgan  
Lehman Gallery

**RIGHT:**  
**Untitled, BBG-6 from  
My Garden Pets, 2009**  
Watercolor, ink,  
graphite on paper  
22 x 15 inches  
Courtesy of the  
artist and Morgan  
Lehman Gallery



*“Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck,  
boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands  
stretch far away”*, 2012

Archival pigment print  
19 x 14 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

**OPPOSITE:**

*Composition/  
Recomposition (II)*, 2013

Digital print on Phototex  
96 x 120 inches  
Courtesy of the artist



## TALIA GREENE

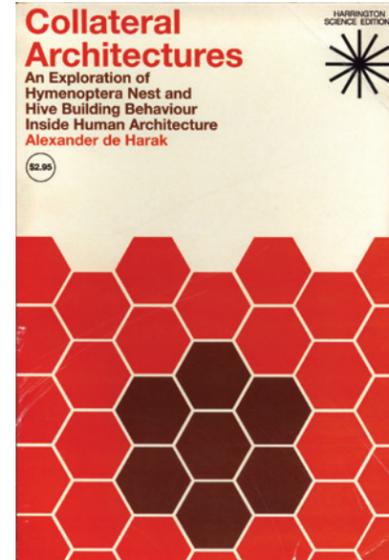
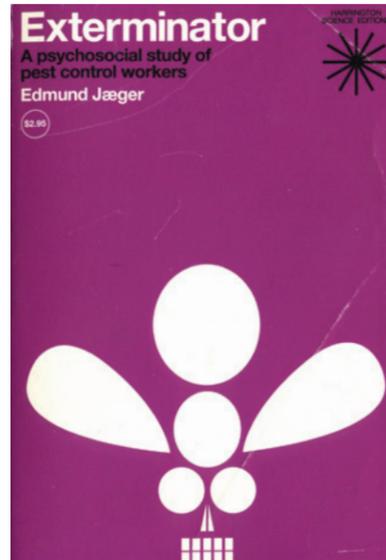
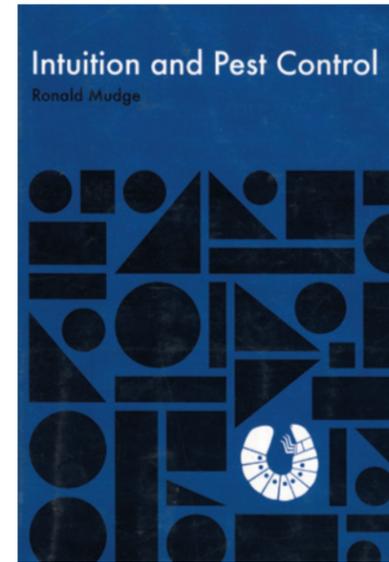
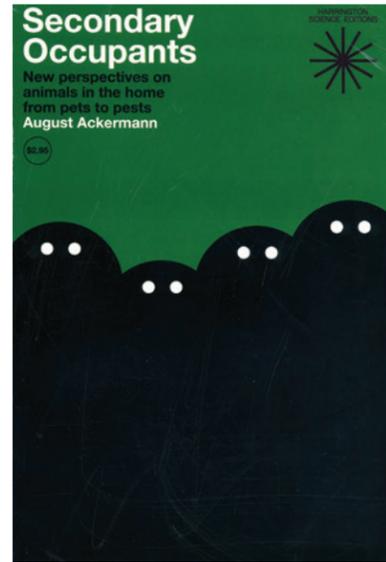
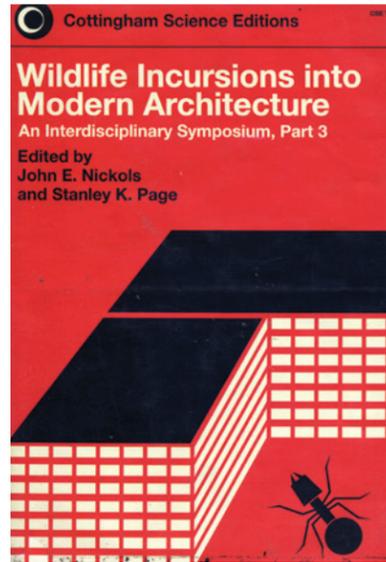
In Talia Greene's botanic wallpaper installation, *Composition/Recomposition II*, plant life is wielded into a conventionally ordered pattern, but gives way to lacy rows of ants which begin to compose their nests from the leaves. Greene considers ants to be the perfect nexus of chaos and organization. They impose a sense of disorder in our homes, but in fact live in highly organized societies. In her print that adorns the wallpaper, giant drifts resembling insect mounds engulf a town, further exploring our vain attempts to impose order on the natural world.



*Asuka Hishiki*  
*Arch of Monarchs, 2013*  
Water-based ink  
on recycled paper  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist

## ASUKA HISHIKI

Asuka Hishiki hand printed thousands of Monarch butterflies on recycled paper to recreate a captivating natural phenomenon in the gallery. The butterflies appear to flutter from the ceiling to the marble wall plaque honoring the Arsenal's original role as the American Museum of Natural History. Every winter millions of Monarchs journey to Mexico to escape cold temperatures, but this marvel is threatened by climate change and habitat destruction. While bringing attention to an ecological concern, Hishiki is also interested in the emotional impact of multiplying a single, precious specimen into a swarm.

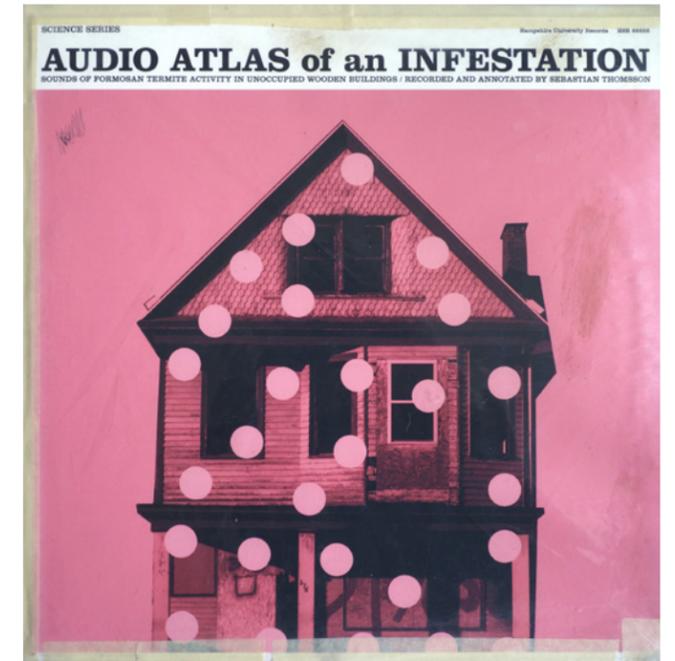


*Volumes from an Imagined Intellectual History of Animals Architecture and Man, 2010-2013*

Digital pigment prints, worn album covers  
Edition of 4 with 2 A.P.  
12.5 x 12.5 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

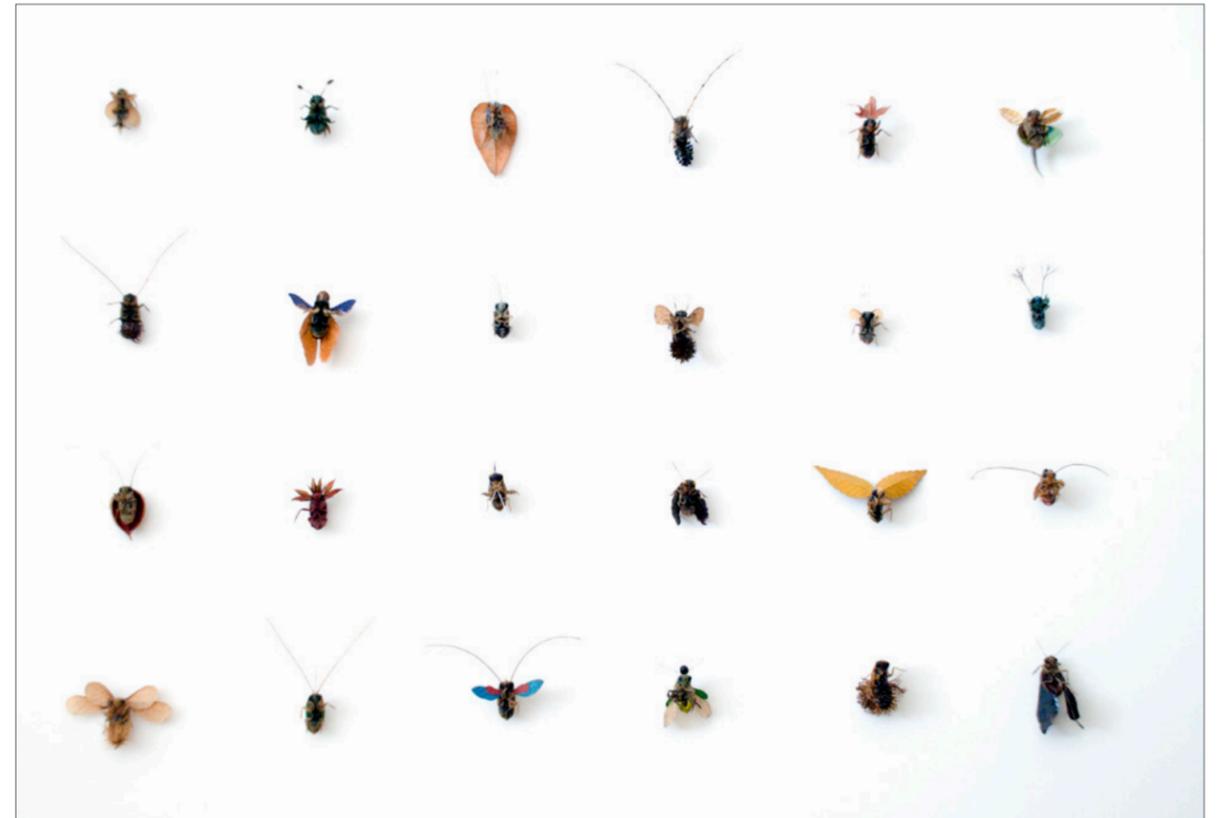
**OPPOSITE:**  
*Volumes from an Imagined Intellectual History of Animals Architecture and Man, 2010-2013*

Digital pigment prints, worn books  
Edition of 4 with 2 A.P.  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist



**JULIAN MONTAGUE**

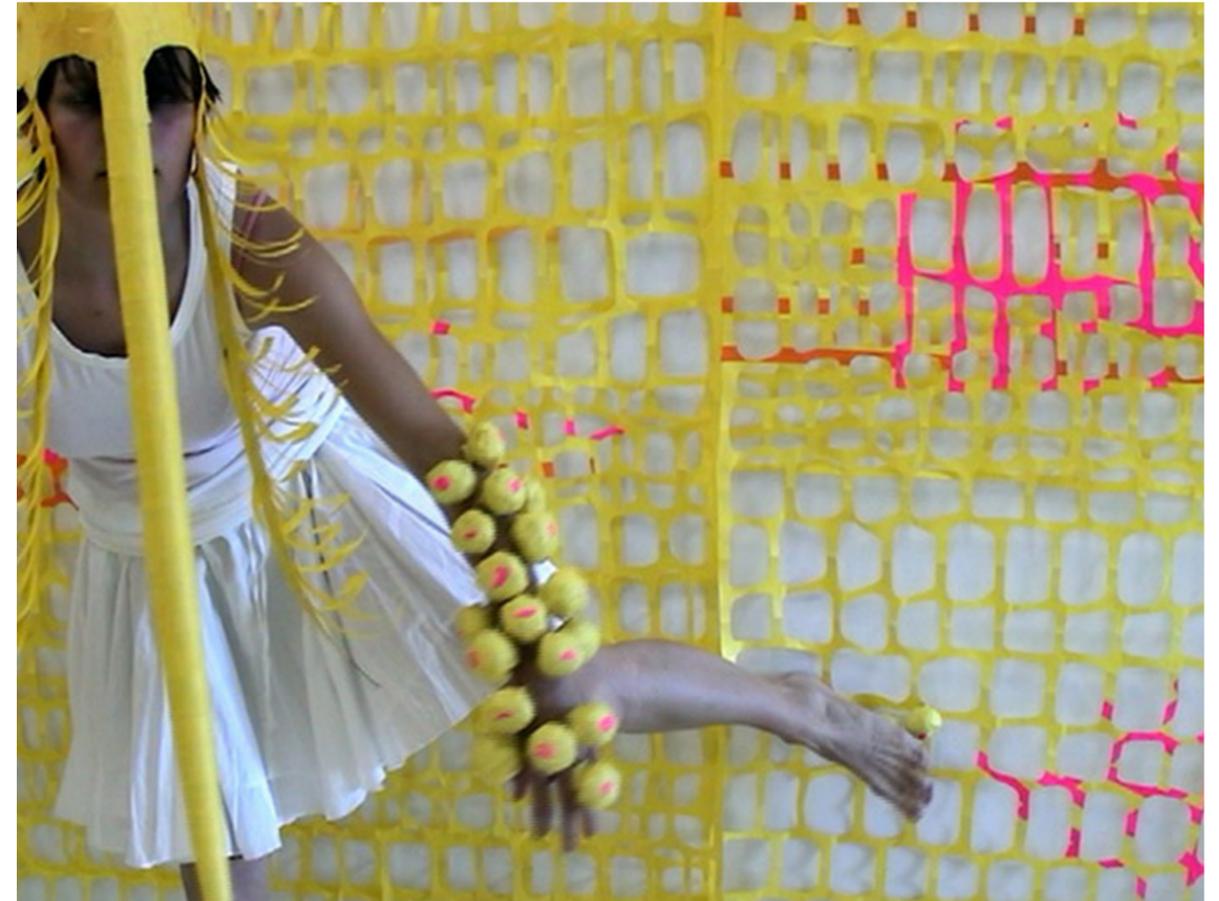
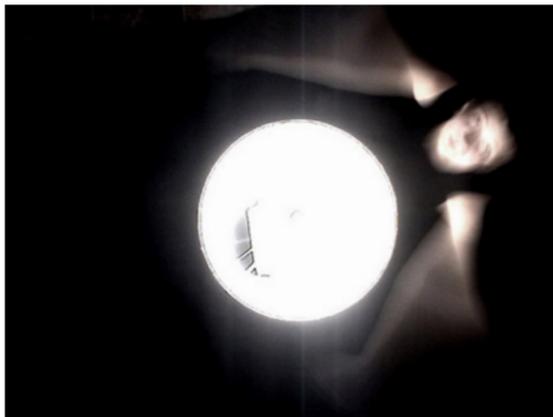
In his project *Secondary Occupants*, Julian Montague has created a fictional character infatuated with documenting insects and other silent witnesses that live on the periphery of our daily lives. When we find insects and other animals in our homes, they transform our inner spaces into external landscapes threatening our perception of safety. His entomologist's library of faux books and records document the hypothetical history of pest control and is convincingly realistic. Montague's bold, geometric book covers are inspired by mid-century graphic designers, who simplified complex subject matter into abstract illustrations.



**Species, 2005-2008**  
Cicada shells, found  
materials, paint, glue  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist

## LISA MURCH

Lisa Murch is the only artist in this exhibition to utilize actual insect specimens in her artwork. Displayed in a shadowbox frame that echoes natural history museum displays, Murch has collected cicadas' abandoned exoskeletons. She creates completely new species of insects by attaching small appendages made out of leaves, twigs, and seedpods. This piece is a playful exploration of the potential for variation in a single group of organisms.



***Insects and Spiders,***  
2005-2006

Video  
Edition of 6  
Courtesy of the artist

**JULIA OLDHAM**

The behavioral patterns of insects and other invertebrates are at the heart of Julia Oldham's video series, *Insects and Spiders*. After observing insects' unique behaviors, she translates them into choreographed performances. She warps her arms and twitters her feet in a meditative performance that can last over a half hour, but then cuts and alters the speed of the film to achieve an insect-like motion. Her colorful backdrops and costumes loosely mimic their environment. By imagining herself as the insect and interpreting their movies, Oldham anthropomorphizes them in her performances.

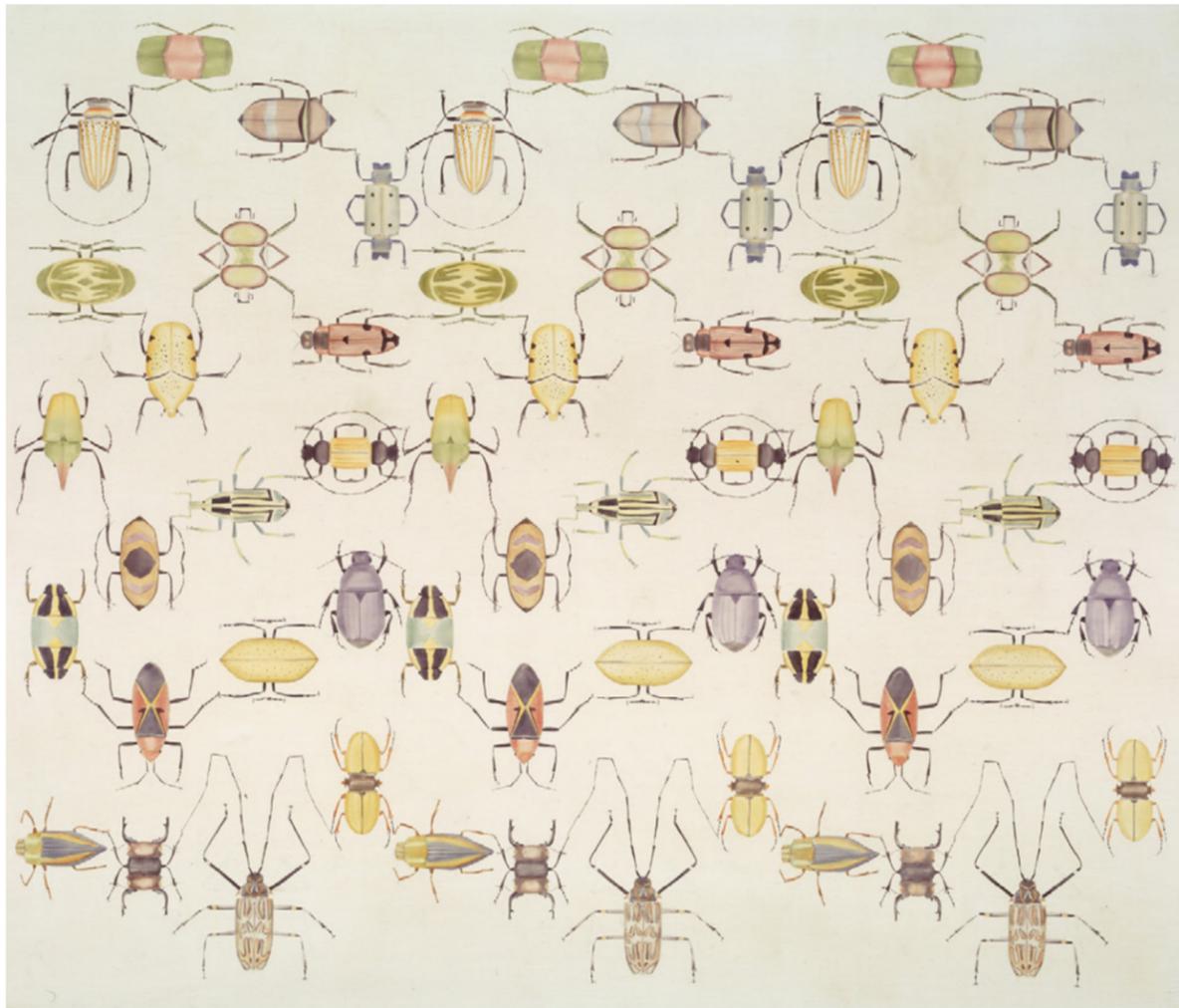


***Glyphosate (Roundup)  
Molecule and Cotton  
Boll Weevil, 1999***  
Welded steel and paper  
31 x 31 inches  
Courtesy of the artist



## CHRISTY RUPP

Christy Rupp's sculpture *Glyphosate (Roundup) Molecule and Cotton Boll Weevil* is from her series on genetically modified food. Labs are regularly engineering strains of produce to be more resistant to pests. Due to an insect's quick lifecycle, they are rapidly affected by changes in their environment, and just as quick to evolve. Engineers continue to introduce additional toxins into seed harvests in order to stay ahead of pests. Rupp reproduces this disastrous cycle in her wall-mounted, rotational sculpture. A modeled molecule chases her paper and wire boll weevil in circles, never quite able to catch up.



**Beetle Frequency, 2000**  
 Oil on linen  
 64 x 74 inches  
 Courtesy of the artist  
 and Feature Inc.



**The Conversation, 2000**  
 Oil on linen  
 46 x 46 inches (each of two)  
 Courtesy of the artist  
 and Feature Inc.

## BEN SNEAD

A native of Colorado, Ben Snead spent his childhood outdoors, where he adopted an appreciation for insects, fish and other animals low on the food chain. Snead uses field guides as references to accurately paint insects' elaborate patterns and other striking formal qualities. He organizes his subjects into geometric patterns—a personal classification system based on aesthetics rather than science. In *Beetle Frequency*, he arranges beetles on a grid system, allowing their respective markings to guide his own pattern making, like a dance or piece of music. Decorative at first glance, his artwork addresses the dichotomy of beauty and exoticism, sameness and otherness as well as the familiar and bizarre.

## THE ARSENAL GALLERY

Located in the historic Arsenal Building in Central Park, the Arsenal Gallery is dedicated to examining themes of nature, urban space, New York City parks and park history through a diverse schedule of art and history exhibitions. The gallery is committed to providing unaffiliated artists, independent curators, and non-profit organizations with an accessible exhibition venue.

### **The Arsenal Gallery, Central Park**

830 Fifth Avenue at 64th Street, Third floor

Gallery Hours:

Monday – Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Closed holidays

---

**Special thanks to the artists and the galleries representing them:** Feature Inc., Morgan Lehman Gallery, and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. Additional thanks are due to the staff at NYC Parks' Art & Antiquities, Arsenal Operations, Parks Shops, and the Central Park Conservancy.

RELATED PROGRAMS:

**Tuesday, October 8, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.**

Lecture: Insects in New York City,  
Michael Feller, Chief Naturalist, Natural Resources Group

**Wednesday, October 30, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.**

Artist Panel: *Notched Bodies* with Joianne Bittle, Emilie Clark, Julia Oldham, and Ben Snead

**Saturday, November 9, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Screening: Insect-themed animated shorts for children

Admission is free but seating is limited. To RSVP, please email [artandantiquities@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:artandantiquities@parks.nyc.gov). For more information, call (212) 360-8163 or visit [www.nyc.gov/parks/art](http://www.nyc.gov/parks/art).



NYC Parks