

Art Review

Buggin' Out: Project InSECT *Leedy-Voulkos Art Center*

By Ashley Waite
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KANSAS CITY – Wandering through Kansas City's Crossroads District on a sleepy, lazy Mother's Day, I never dreamed I'd be learning inquisitive little tidbits about a praying mantis.

The current exhibition, Project InSECT (International Spectrum of Enormous Crawling Things), at the Leedy-Voulkos Art Center proved not only extremely educational about the hairy-legged critters, but also provided an intimacy with a delicate distinction that only a fine painter of portraits can bring.

Project InSECT is an exhibition of personalities and human traits, gigantic friendly portraits of bugs from which the artists, Jessa Heubing-Reitiner and her husband, James, create a "common thread experience" connecting humans to the immeasurable universe of insects.

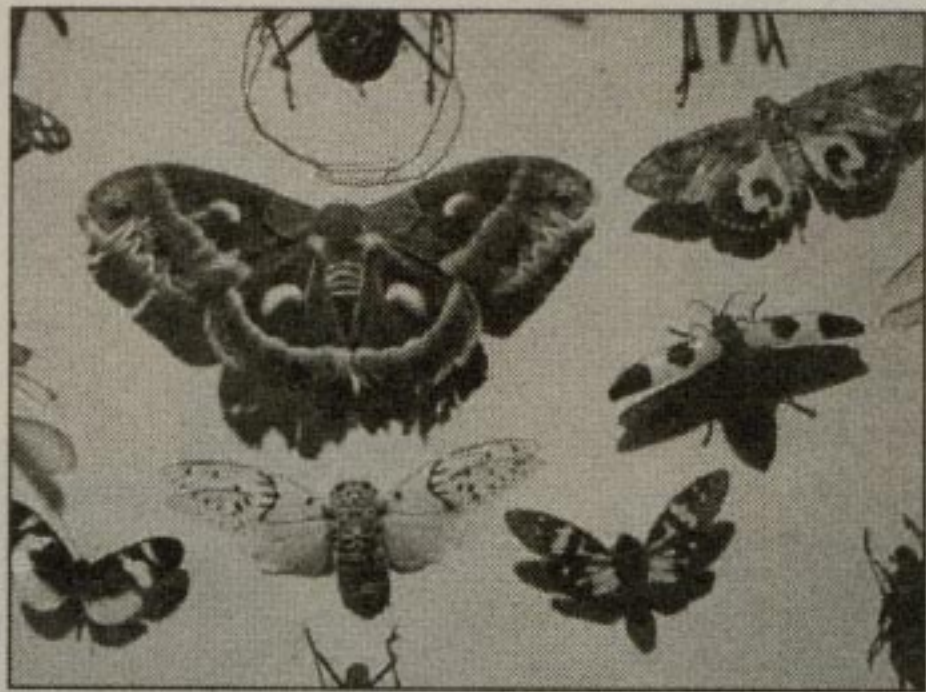
This year-long journey began small, and through community support, it has become an interactive celebration of life and creation of all forms. Jessa, a portrait painter, clearly has a unique way of executing her grand representations/performance painting.

Standing, bending, kneeling, and gesturing in front of eager children and adults alike, Jessa brings her brushes to life with careful precision and detail while explaining the processes of stretching an eight-foot canvas and the complexity of mixing paint.

Always in front of a live audience and using actual specimen, Jessa studies the tiny critters and paints them up to 200 times their size.

"Rusty the Dragon Fly" is so eloquently detailed that each vein can be seen in his large wide-spread wings.

Painted with such excitement and feel-



The Specimen

ing, the insects are portrayed in a dramatic stage-like setting with one spotlight, as if ready to burst with a unique monologue, a personal tale of life, color, beauty, and energy.

With each specimen displayed next to its corresponding portrait, the gallery is full of vigor and a life-force unimaginable. James paints insects on children's faces and guides them to the immaculate displays of butterflies and beetles, while Jessa does her thing on stage.

Mothers and daughters look through the provided microscopes at blue and gold wings and creepy antenna while fathers and sons learn about Burnt Sienna and Yellow Oxide (both colors of paint).

As a viewer, one is completely engrossed (not grossed out) with the raw beauty of these bugs.

Wings with a soft angelic shape and a grandmotherly warmth come from a portrait of a cicada named "Agnes," while a mysterious seducing look is shot over the shoulder of an iridescent jewel bee named "Harley."

Each portrait has a natural personality, making it inevitable for me to think twice the next time a beetle crawls across the floor and I raise my foot ready to stamp it out.

Project InSECT was a way for me as a viewer, student, and fellow Earthling to connect on a universal level with the ultimate masterpieces we call bugs.