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Bye Bye Biodiversity: Insects, Art and Climate Change

Bekka Ord  
*Macalester College*

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Bye Bye Biodiversity: Insects, Art and Climate Change
Bekka Ord
Art and Art History Department
Advisor: Ruthann Godollei
April 25th, 2018
Abstract

*Bye Bye Biodiversity* explores the intersection between insects, art and climate change. This project examines two insect species impacted by climate change, the eastern larch beetle (*Dendroctonus simplex*) and the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*). As the larch beetle population booms and devastates Northern forests, the monarchs’ numbers decline. Climate change is often conveyed through numbers and graphs, but equal weight needs to be placed on the visceral in order to create an emotional reaction and connection. This project aims to create that emotional response to the scientific reality of climate change and its impact on two insect species.
Artist Statement

Humans have changed Earth’s climate. Increasing amounts of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are warming oceans, melting ice caps, and raising sea levels. As our climate changes, we discuss the implication this has on humans, polar bears and other charismatic megafauna, but insects, one of the most numerous family of critters has been left out.

At any given time there are 10 quintillion (10,000,000,000,000,000,000) individual insects alive, from microscopic to startlingly large. Insects blanket our planet, as important actors within ecosystems and as conveyers of environmental health. From the giant Goliath Beetle to the tiniest of Fairyflies. The colors of the Lepidopteran wings reflect holographic sheens, the odd shape of the treehoppers are like tiny gilded shields, the jewel beetles look as though they have been dipped in molten gold– their segmented body parts connecting in perfect angular precision and endless combinations of evolutionary divergence.

Growing up next to a shrinking glacier, I have seen my home change as a result of climate change. But it’s not often that people in the United States can relate on a personal and daily level to these powerful climatic shifts. Historically, art and science have been intermingled fields, each relying on the other in symbiosis to share the mysteries of the planet. Over time, these two fields have slowly parted ways. It is my hope that this work will bring attention to the fascinating and rapidly changing world of insects and work to bridge the fields of science and art to convey the turmoil of changes our six legged cohabitants are undergoing.

This installation looks specifically at the eastern larch beetle (*Dendroctonus simplex*) and the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*). As the larch beetle population booms and devastates Northern forests, the monarchs’ migration is under threat, their numbers declining. This project uses sculptural elements and over 1,200 handmade bugs to visualize these changing insect species populations and to show people just two of the countless consequences of anthropogenic climate change. Climate change is often conveyed through numbers and graphs, but I believe using art is an equally powerful tool to educate and address the alarming and frightening realities of climate change. As the gallery viewer stands among the sawdust representative of the Northern forests devastated by the eastern larch beetles expanding territory and they stand underneath the hanging dome of more than a thousand beetles, I hope to overwhelm the viewer. As you look upon the nearly empty welded tree representative of an Oyamel Fir tree, the trees the monarchs migrate to in Mexico, and contemplate the delicate and dying monarchs, a nerve will be struck. As the beetles population wax and the butterflies wane, we say bye bye to biodiversity.
Larch Beetles in progress, April 2018
Larch Beetles in Law Warschaw Gallery, April 2018
Monarch Butterflies on Oyamel Fir in Law Warschaw Gallery, April 2018