

Insects Encouraged to Shack Up in Midtown Manhattan

This June, a "Love Motel for Insects" will arrive at various locations in Manhattan, first stop--Jim Kempner Fine Arts on June 8th. Insects and people alike will be drawn to these ultra-violet lights, and the artist/biologist Brandon Ballengée hopes, viewers will be enticed by observing the ecology of their own backyards. He notes that besides cockroaches and bedbugs, there isn't much known about what species of insects inhabit New York City, and hopes to begin cataloguing its insect diversity. The image above shows "Love Motel for Insects: Midtown Manhattan Study Unit," a mini test version of the sculptures installed on top of his studio building in midtown Manhattan. Native plants at the base of the unit help create a rooftop micro-habitat, part of his Audubon fellowship.

It's not just bugs that interest Ballengée--as the range of artworks in his current multi-media exhibit "Collapse: The Cry of Silent Forms" in Manhattan's [Ronald Feldman Fine Arts](#) gallery attest. His scientific research is not on insects but on amphibians--specifically, deformities in wetland ecosystems. Ballengée: "The amphibian art is inspired from my direct research experiences with the deformed frogs both in the field and laboratory. It is not intended as scientific illustration or documentation. Instead, chemically cleared and stained preserved frogs and toads with fatal deformities are carefully arranged on a high-resolution scanner with layers of laboratory cotton and glycerol. The resulting image files are printed on water color ink on water color paper so the frog is roughly the size of a human toddler ... This size is made to be engaging, to bring people in and encourage contemplation."

The frog and toads that are subjects of his artistic and scientific work are deformed by mechanical perturbation, rather than genetic anomalies. These perturbations can be caused by parasitic infections or damage by predators like dragonfly nymphs while still developing from tadpoles. The exhibit will be up at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts through the end of July.

Photographs courtesy Brandon Ballengée and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.





DFB 31, Arcás, scanner photograph of cleared and stained multi-limbed Pacific Tree frog from Aptos, California. In scientific collaboration with Dr. Stanley K. Sessions. Title in collaboration with the poet KuyDelair. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



DFA 117, Galatée. Scanner photograph of cleared and stained multi-limbed Pacific Tree frog from Aptos, California, in scientific collaboration with Dr. Stanley K. Sessions. Title in collaboration with the poet KuyDelair. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



DFBB 1, Khaos. Scanner photograph of cleared and stained missing limb Common toad from, Yorkshire, England. In scientific collaboration with Richard Sunter. Title in collaboration with the poet KuyDelair. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Vertical Fall in the Winter call that dances in the spring nocturnal,¹² from the series: A Season in Hell; Deadly Born Cry¹³ by Brandon Ballengée with versified titles forming a poem by KuyDelair. In scientific collaboration with Stanley K. Sessions. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Art, New York.