

Cotter, Holland. "Brandon Ballengée 'Collapse: The Cry of Silent Forms.'" *The New York Times*, June 15, 2012. C. 25.

Brandon Ballengée

'Collapse: The Cry of Silent Forms'

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts
31 Mercer Street, SoHo
Through July 31

Although Brandon Ballengée, who trained as both an artist and a biologist, has been a presence in and around the New York City art scene for several years, this is his first big local gallery solo, and it's a strong one. In it art and science, age-old partners, meet, linked by a connective tissue of ecological consciousness.

The specific topical focus is the continuing degradation of biosystems in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, an event that had devastating effects on marine and avian wildlife and on the commercial fishing industry. A video near the start of the show interweaves feel-good promotional films about the gulf's recovery — in one, women talk about the ingredients that go into making a proper New Orleans-style seafood gumbo — with grim pollution statistics. The gallery is dominated by a pyramid-shaped display of glass jars holding dead and in some cases deformed specimens of crabs, shrimp and fish gathered off the Louisiana coast and elsewhere by the artist and colleagues. (The show travels to the Acadiana Center for the

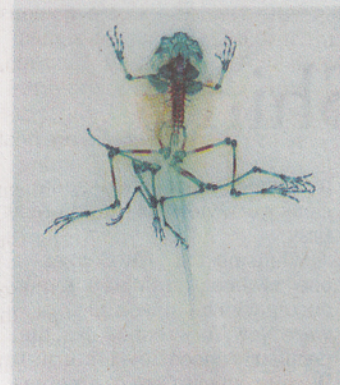
Arts in Lafayette, La., in the fall.)

Mr. Ballengée pushes the scope of the exhibition beyond a site-specific case study with large, X-ray-like photographs of dead birds, some altered genetically to be born wingless, and with excerpts from a second series of pictures of frogs with misshapen or missing limbs, begun in 1996. Research suggests that the amphibian damage was partly a result of attacks by parasites that thrive in habitats altered by pollution.

Given his subject, Mr. Ballengée could have gotten away with a didactic show and tell, but he has gone much further, delivering visual drama — in photographs the amphibian skeletons shimmer like jeweled filigree —

and textured moral thinking. This is art for adults: factual, disturbing, beautiful.

HOLLAND COTTER



RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS, NEW YORK

An image from Brandon Ballengée's "Collapse: The Cry of Silent Forms."