

"WELL IF": Ballengee Grieves and Rejoices -

on Saturday, 01 December 2012.

Brandon Ballengee (</artist-index/item/brandon-ballengee>) 's singular commitment to the well-being of all Earthly species embraces dual strategies. His career might be titled "Well If" – as if to say, "Well if rejoicing in diversity doesn't suffice, grieving its diminishment might."

By presenting emotionally-charged commentary that is grounded in neutered scientific documentation, Ballengee straddles opposite sides of the biological, attitudinal, and methodological divides simultaneously.



On the one hand, "Love Motels for Insects" celebrates the extravagant profusion of insect species on the planet. This installation has encouraged 'spineless' arthropod sex in Asia, Europe, the Americas, Australia, and Israel. Viewers may be disappointed that his motel settings lack heart-shaped beds and mirrored ceilings, but the hedonist paradises created by Ballengee appeal to arthropod eroticism. Instead of dimming the lights, Ballengee turns the lights on to full voltage to arouse the insect who can't resist.

The glaring ultra violet lights are installed along with bed sheets as outdoor sculptures. While the insects are swooning, courting, and copulating, he and community members are counting insect species and tabulating their diversity. Ballengee is a laborious voyeur and methodical cataloguer.

But the same artist conjures horrifying spectacles of ecological destruction and species loss. His recent debut exhibition at the Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York was a disturbing evocation of the impact of the 2010 explosion of a British Petroleum Deepwater Horizon drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico. Concern for the grievous wrong committed on animal victims is encapsulated in the exhibition's title: "Collapse: The Cry of Silent Forms."

One of the sorrowful components of this diverse exhibition consisted of a 15 foot high four-sided pyramid constructed out of one-gallon glass jars. The jars contained specimens of species found in the Gulf of Mexico. They were arranged in the order of a marine food chain. The simplest life-forms (bottom feeders and plants) appeared at the bottom. They were interspersed with tar balls. The more complex life-forms filled the jars at the top. This evolutionary chronicle was anchored in the corners by jars containing the toxins that dealt their doom - crude oil and Corexit, the toxic solvent used to break up the oil slick into sub-surface globules. Empty jars conveyed the destiny of these populations. They were ominous reminders of the threat to species when life-sustaining conditions are massively disrupted.

Placed within the context of Ballengee's inclusive explorations, the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico ceases to be a terrible event, and assumes a more significant role as symptom of a wider disaster.

Ballengee confirms the breadth of his activist intentions by stating, in the text accompanying this exhibition, "to try to get the local populous to realize what's still happening, and hopefully that could effectively reach media, and then through media and popular support push for governmental reform and, you know, real pressure on BP to try to either do better restoration efforts, honest restoration efforts, and then to allow for research to see what's been actually happening."