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The Sphinx Moth: A Work of Art

Published by Nancy on December 1, 2008 in Plants & Insects. 2 Comments

Tags: art, butterflies, butterfly, carolyn norton, caterpillar, chad erpelding, chad hines, cockrell butterfly center, cultural connections, curator, dallas museum of art, damien hirst, entomologist, entomology, hmns, insect art, margaret pledger, mel chin, olafur eliasson, science and art interact, sfa, sphingidae, sphinx moth, stephen f. austin state university, studio art, william godwin.

Today we have a special guest blog from Chad Erpelding, Assistant Professor of Art at [Stephen F. Austin State University](#) in Nacogdoches, Texas. He teaches 2D Design and Painting there.

This fall the [Cockrell Butterfly Center](#) is hosting an exhibit of some of his students' paintings that were inspired by [sphinx moths](#). Here is what he has to say about the project.

The overlap between art and science is a subject rich with potential and currently being investigated by many artists. [Damien Hirst](#) suspends animal specimens in large tanks of formaldehyde. [Olafur Eliasson](#), who is currently having a major survey of his work at the [Dallas Museum of Art](#), explores weather systems and natural phenomena. [Mel Chin](#) worked closely with a scientist in realizing his piece *Revival Field*, which uses plants to remove toxic metals from a polluted site. So when Dr. William Godwin, entomologist at Stephen F. Austin State University and adjunct curator at HMNS, brought up the idea of a joint project between the Biology Department and the School of Art at SFA, I jumped at the opportunity.

We decided to organize a competition for the art students centered on sphinx moths (family Spingidae), several members of which are found locally in Nacogdoches and throughout east Texas (see [Nancy's recent blog](#) on these fascinating moths.) Dr. Godwin gave a lecture on the characteristics and life cycle of sphinx moths, giving the students the base of knowledge needed to understand their subject. From here, I stressed to the students the importance of finding the balance between accuracy towards the moths and the inventiveness that happens in the studio. The restrictions we put on the entries were only on size and weight of the pieces themselves. We wanted the students to have the freedom to explore their own interpretations and realize their creative impulses.

I was thrilled with some of the pieces the students created. Carolyn Norton, a graduate student from Lufkin, won first place for her piece "Sonic Defense," an ink drawing that follows the paths of a bat and moth in battle, including an explosion of scales – a trick that moths do to fool their predators mid-air.

Margaret Pledger, a senior from Brenham, received second place for her "Pupa Ring," a copper ring based loosely on the shapes of sphinx moth pupae. Chad Hines, a graduate

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RT @gentlewater: Buenas Noches our sweet, sweet Lois #CorpseFlower. You brought us so much joy in such short time. Mahalo!!! – posted on Jul 27, 2010 11:20 am

Amazing detail shots of Lois from avocacat in our Flickr pool: <http://ow.ly/2gQFX> #corpseflower Share yours with us! <http://ow.ly/2gQH2> – posted on Jul 26, 2010 03:45 pm

<http://ow.ly/2gPCb> RT @hortzac: @stephsarkle keep checking blog! I do monthly posts & will keep everyone up to date #corpseflower – posted on Jul 26, 2010 03:14 pm

Seconded! RT @hortzac: I want to give a big THANK YOU to everyone who came & saw Lois, kept up with her thru webcam & twitter!



student from Temple, received third place for his "Sphingidae," a drawing that simultaneously

explores the patterns of the moths and the joys of making marks on paper.



The truly fascinating part of this project for me was to see the many different directions that the artists took. You never know from where inspiration will come. While some of the students looked at the patterns and shapes of the moths, others were interested in their habits or specific characteristics. A few explored broader cultural connections, using the moths as a metaphor for the human experience. Whatever the source, I think this was a great opportunity for both the science and art communities to see how our fields can interact. It encourages us to continue to see the world in new and awe-inspiring ways.



Please be sure to stop and take a look at these interesting works of art on your next visit to the [Butterfly Center](#). They are in the lower level (just around the corner from the mosquito display) and will remain on display until March, 2009.



#corpseflower – posted on Jul 26, 2010 02:40 pm

New Lois #corpseflower photos in our Flickr set. See the end of her blooming cycle: <http://flic.kr/p/8mRZNg> – posted on Jul 26, 2010 11:15 am

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12 days of HMNS 100 objects **100 years 100 objects** Anthropology archaeology artifacts Astronomy bob bakker bugs butterflies Butterfly Cockrell Butterfly Center dinosaur dinosaurs dr. bakker dr. robert bakker Education Energy entomology evolution fossils gems Houston insects jupiter leonardo lois Lucy Mars minerals moon NASA night sky **Paleontology** photo photography photos planets preserving artifacts preserving objects saturn science museum stargazing stars sun venus video Zoology

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Sphinx Moth art, on display in the lower level of the Cockrell Butterfly Center.

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2 Response to “The Sphinx Moth: A Work of Art”

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mar

December 2, 2008 at 10:11 am

I appreciate and applaud the work of you and your students and also your notations of inspiration!!! These cross curricular projects seem to have such impact and are important teaching tools!

If you don't know what Mel Chin is up to these days, it is worth a visit the FUNDRED DOLLAR BILL / OPERATION PAYDIRT website (www.fundred.org) to check out Mel's current art/science project involving scientists, landscape architects and 3,000,000 students working in New Orleans to neutralize lead-polluted soil, developing a model to rescue other post-industrial cities with similar problems.

Students are creating “FUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS” – hand drawn, original interpretations of U.S. one hundred dollar bills. These artworks support of OPERATION PAYDIRT by raising local and national awareness of the hidden lead problem in New Orleans. The FUNDRED DOLLAR BILL “artworks” created by students will be collected by armored truck and delivered to Washington D.C. where an even exchange of the value of their art currency for actual goods, services and funding will be requested. The awareness raised by FUNDRED is intended to support a citywide solution to the lead contaminated soil challenging environmental health.

This is not only a fun project but an important one and everyone can participate by making the FUNDRED BILL artworks. For more info you can contact questions@fundred.org.

[Where Have All the Bugs Gone? | BEYONDbones](#)
Pingback on Dec 4th, 2008 at 4:27 pm

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