

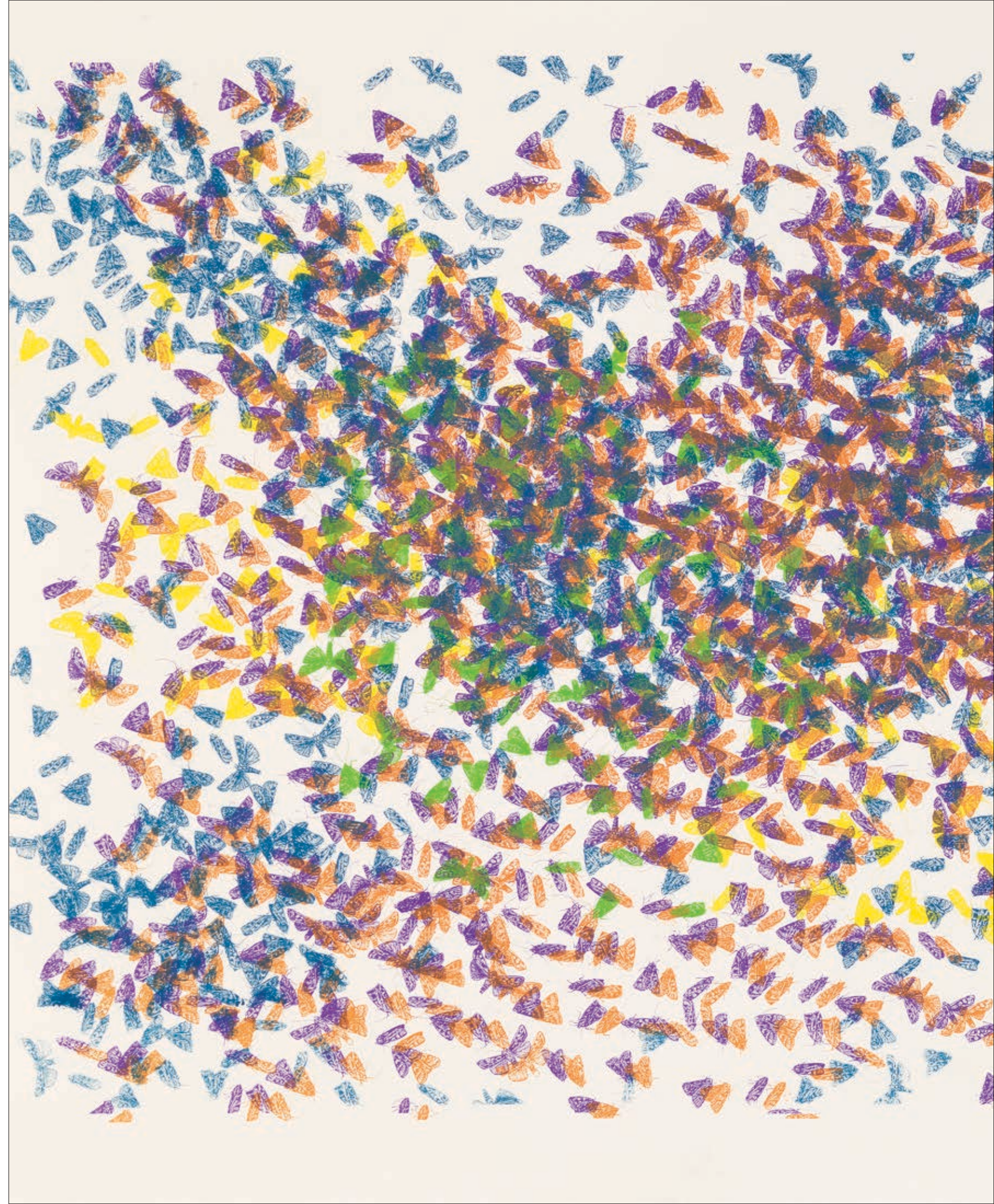
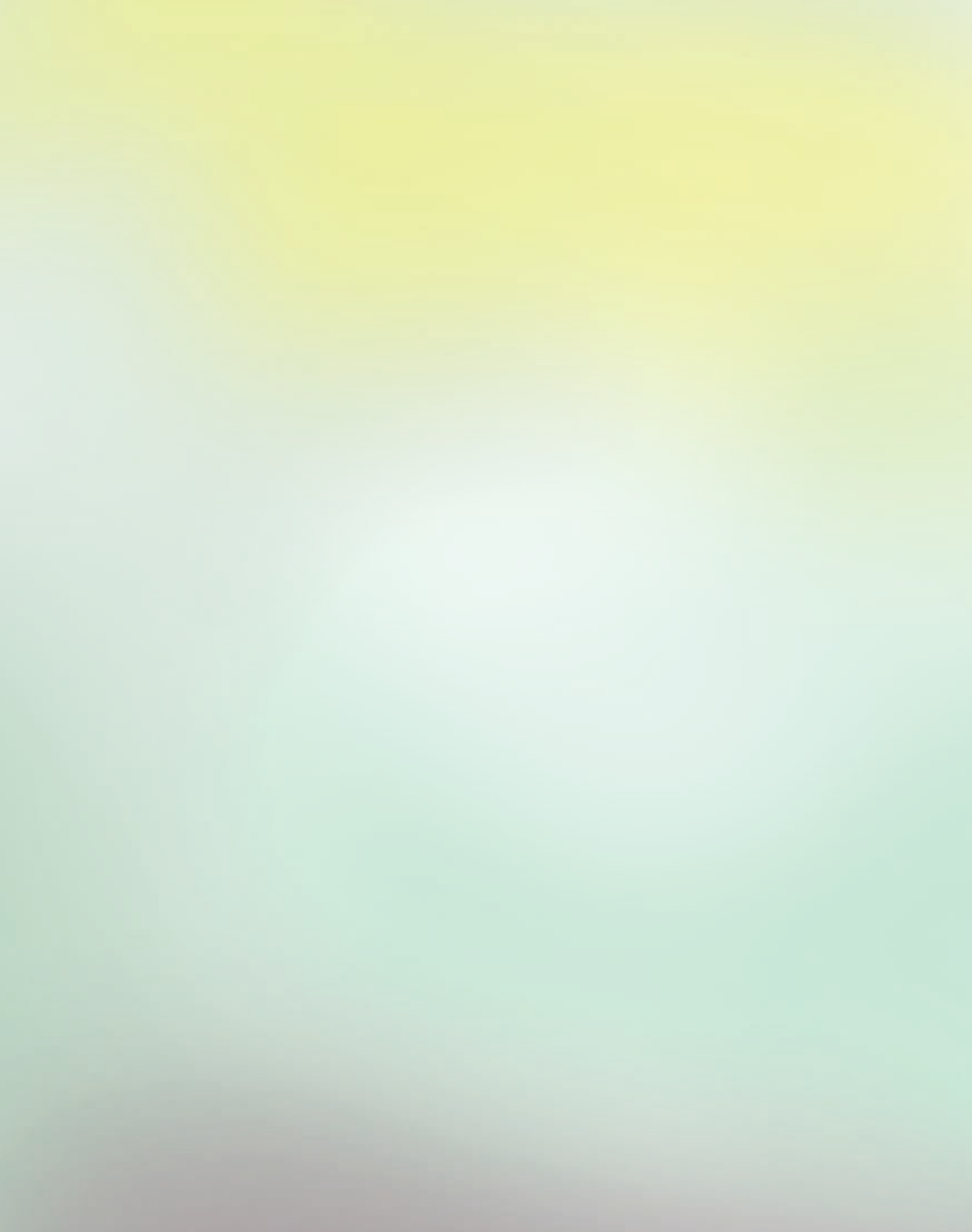
Fragile Earth: The Naturalist Impulse in Contemporary Art

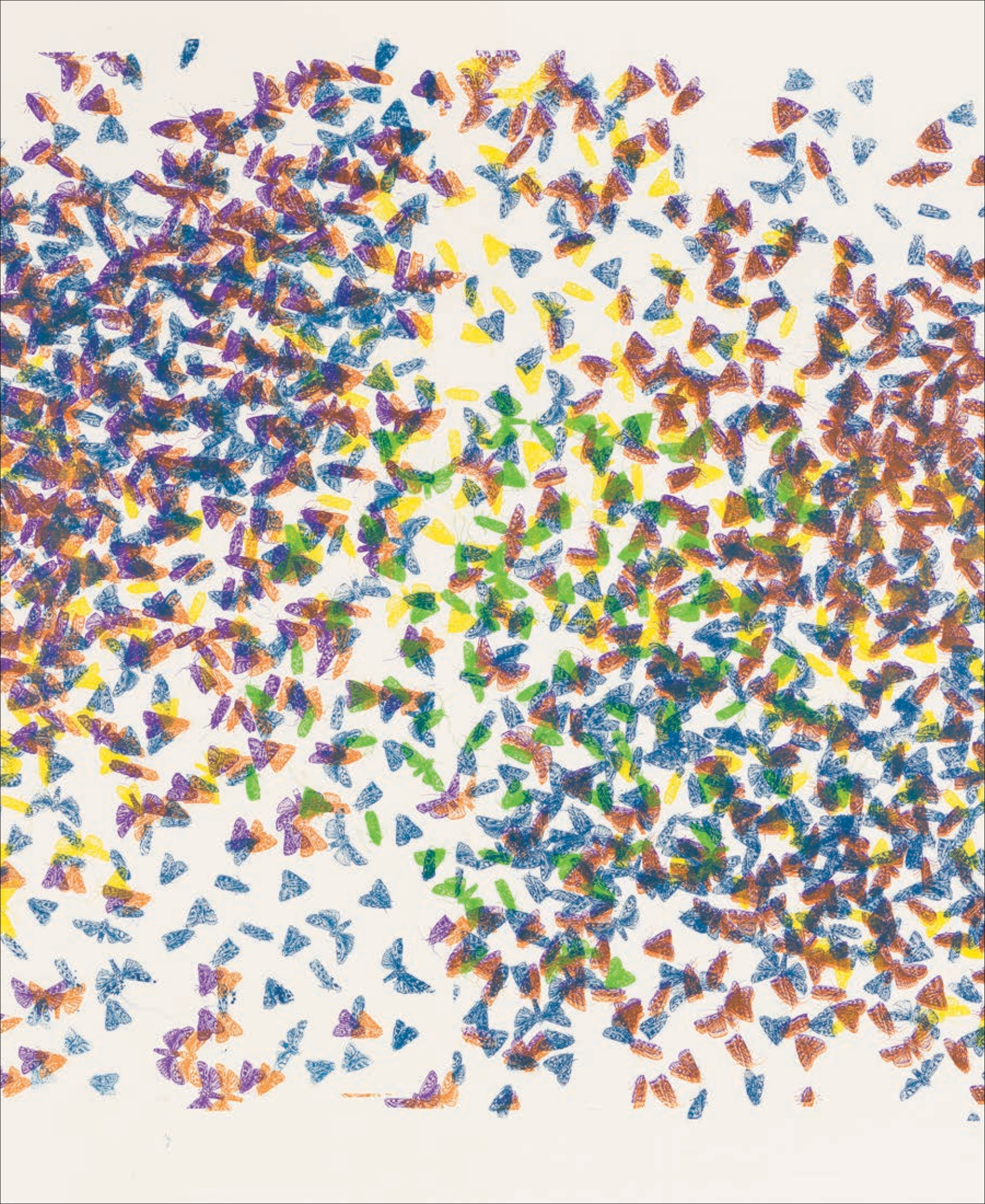
Fragile Earth

The Naturalist
Impulse in
Contemporary Art



FLORENCE GRISWOLD MUSEUM
Home of American Impressionism





Fragile Earth

The Naturalist
Impulse in
Contemporary Art

JENNIFER STETTLER PARSONS

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

JENNIFER ANGUS

MARK DION

JAMES PROSEK

COURTNEY MATTISON

JANE LUBCHENCO



FLORENCE GRISWOLD MUSEUM
OLD LYME, CONNECTICUT

Published on the occasion of the exhibition
Fragile Earth: The Naturalist Impulse in Contemporary Art,
Florence Griswold Museum, June 1, 2019 – September 8, 2019.

Fragile Earth: The Naturalist Impulse in Contemporary Art has been made possible with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts, Department of Economic and Community Development, Connecticut Office of the Arts, Bank of America, the Nika P. Thayer Exhibition and Publication Fund, Mr. & Mrs. Maxwell M. Belding, Mr. Charles T. Clark, The Howard Gilman Foundation, The Vincent Dowling Family, Mr. & Mrs. J. Geddes Parsons, Mr. William Blunt White, as well as donors to the Museum's Annual Fund.

MEDIA SPONSORS
WSHU PUBLIC RADIO, *CONNECTICUT COTTAGES & GARDENS*

Copyright © by the Board of Trustees of the Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme, Connecticut.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any other information storage or retrieval system (beyond copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright law and except by reviewers for the public press) without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address the publisher Florence Griswold Museum, 96 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, Connecticut 06371

Printed and bound in the United States by Puritan Capital
Designed by Jenny Chan, Jack Design, New York

Distributed by Wesleyan University Press



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA
[TK]
ISBN: 978-1-880897-31-7

IMAGE CREDITS
Paul Mutino for the Florence Griswold Museum:
[page numbers to come]
Mark Dion and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/Los Angeles:
Courtney Mattison:
James Prosek and Waqas Wajahat, New York:
[more to come]
[Recycled Logo] The paper used in this publication is a recycled stock certified by the Forest Stewardship Council and originates from responsible sources.

Cover image: Jennifer Angus, Insect Bell Jar

Frontispiece: ?

CONTENTS

- 00 FOREWORD
Rebekah Beaulieu

- 00 *Fragile Earth:
The Naturalist Impulse in Contemporary Art*
Jennifer Stettler Parsons

- 00 DIALOGUE
In Search of Nature
Mark Dion and James Prosek

- 00 DIALOGUE
**Clay, Coral, and Climate Change:
Sculpting Hope for the Ocean**
Courtney Mattison and Jane Lubchenco

- 00 **Silver Wings and Golden Scales;
Or, An Evening of Metamorphosis at the Lyme Art Colony**
A fantasy by Jennifer Angus

- PLATES
- 00 James Prosek
- 000 Courtney Mattison
- 000 Mark Dion
- 000 Jennifer Angus

- 000 BIOGRAPHIES
- 000 CHECKLIST OF KRIEBLE GALLERY
- 000 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FOREWORD

One critical historical and cultural role of museums has been to serve as host to exhibitions of exemplary works of art and materiality, acting to edify the public and to facilitate scholarly inquiry. In the twenty-first century, the character of progressive museums has evolved to encourage provocation, experiential learning, and to stimulate dialogue. As stated in our mission, the unique and inimitable legacy of the Florence Griswold Museum is to interpret the art, culture, and landscape of Connecticut, a charge that is embraced fully in *Fragile Earth: The Naturalist Impulse in Contemporary Art*, curated by Assistant Curator Jennifer Stettler Parsons and featuring four trailblazing artists: Jennifer Angus, Mark Dion, Courtney Mattison, and James Prosek.

In 2017 Dr. Parsons curated *Flora/Fauna: The Naturalist Impulse in American Art*, which utilized the Museum's collections and selected loans to illuminate the history of artist-naturalists from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, revealing the multifaceted ways in which such artists documented nature, and how their representations contributed to American cultural identity. Two years later we are proud to present *Flora/Fauna's* contemporary sequel. In this exhibition, the four featured artists again centralize our natural context, advancing the conversation to address issues of environmental vulnerability and sustainability. A museum rarely has the opportunity to activate a dynamic response to its surrounding environment and to align historical and contemporary interests such as the one Dr. Parsons has shaped in this project. As adept interpreter of the historical narrative of naturalism in *Flora/Fauna* and as insightful moderator of contemporary perspectives on the same topic in *Fragile Earth*, Dr. Parsons reinforces the significant legacy of the Florence Griswold Museum as a locus for artistic contemplation and creation.

Though Angus, Dion, Mattison, and Prosek's work takes a variety of forms and attends to different components of our natural landscape from the sea to the sky, they collectively espouse a common quest to understand our natural landscape and the role of man within it. Echoing the experiences of the members of the Lyme Art Colony who traveled to Miss Florence's boardinghouse more than a century ago, so do these four artists journey to the shoreline of the Lieutenant River, the most recent in a long line of artists inspired by and responding to the singular landscape that surrounds the Florence Griswold Museum. In this way, we continue to serve as an artistic home for creatives who seek to understand the natural world in their art, to ponder its natural evolution, and, for better or worse, the role we as humans play in its future.

In addition to serving as *Flora/Fauna's* chronological and spiritual sequel, *Fragile Earth* reifies the commitment of the Museum to our landscape and its future. Concurrent with the exhibition of *Fragile Earth* is the inauguration of the Robert F. Schumann Artists' Trail circumnavigating our grounds, which celebrates the historical artistic experience of the Lyme Art Colony, the cultural heritage of the property, and the robust ecology of the Connecticut shoreline. In both the establishment of the Artists' Trail and ongoing landscape interpretation, as well as the historically significant exhibitions we host in our galleries, we look to represent and to sustain the vibrant life of the Florence Griswold Museum in all its forms. This publication serves as documentation of the exhibition and the artistic contributions it has inspired, as well as a record of the pivotal moment in which we find ourselves as citizens of the natural world.

Rebekah Beaulieu, Ph.D.
Director

Fragile Earth: The Naturalist Impulse in Contemporary Art

Jennifer Stettler Parsons



FIG 1
Mark Dion, *New England Cabinet of Marine Debris (Lyme Art Colony)* (detail), 2019.
Wood, metal, plastic and found debris, Lyme Art Colony artifacts, Florence Griswold
Museum, Purchase

“We could change the world tomorrow if all the millions of people
around the world acted the way they believe.” — Dr. Jane Goodall

Nature surrounds us, but do we really see it? Each day we encounter the natural environment by inhabiting the landscape and consuming resources. Some people understand nature as the stuff outside our windows, but what about the ways in which we depend on it? Much more than lovely flowers or sights seen on a weekend hike, nature comprises the very ground supporting our homes, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and our vital food sources. These elements in our world may appear constant, but what if they were no longer secure? This is our current predicament. Earth has entered the phase called the Anthropocene, an era during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. Human actions such as the excessive use of fossil fuels, the pillaging of natural resources, and pollution from discarded plastic and other chemicals have set off a host of environmental changes, upsetting the balance of Earth’s ecosystem and spurring climate change. The detrimental effects include the warming of the planet’s atmosphere and ocean waters; shrinking glaciers and rising sea levels, changes in precipitation patterns that instigate tropical storm surges, drought, and wildfires that threaten homes and habitats; and changes in seasonal temperatures which impact everything from agriculture to human allergies.¹ Scientists agree that the condition of our planet is in danger, but the general public’s acknowledgement of the urgency of this threat, which impacts our personal wellbeing and that of our children, lags behind. Fortunately, artists

help us to see by bolstering the subjects and objects that deserve notice and recognition. In light of the environmental crisis steadily deteriorating the earth and our health, contemporary artists are demonstrating a naturalist impulse with more vigor than ever before.

Throughout history artists have used their creativity to draw attention to the most pressing issues of their era, and have helped shape social debates and conversations across the gamut of American events. They have recorded the founding of the nation and subsequent territorial exploration and colonization; they have documented acts of racism, war, growing industrialization, and the struggle for gender equality and civil rights. The early years of the twenty-first century have witnessed a surge in artistic production related to the state of the environment, a crisis which some would argue has been building for generations, but has only recently gained noticeable ground in politics and media. Concurrently, a new subfield of ecocritical art history is burgeoning alongside a deluge of related museum exhibitions.² Of course, artists’ interest in the natural environment is not new. In the years following the establishment of the United States, a cadre of artists exhibited a naturalist impulse—a desire to study and record flora and fauna—that led them to participate in forging an American natural history. They joined surveyors and acted as cataloguers, collectors of specimens, and early environmental preservationists.³

1 For up-to-date information see <https://climate.nasa.gov/effects/>.

2 For more on ecocritical art history, see Alan Braddock and Karl Kusserow, eds., *Nature’s Nation: American Art and Environment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018); Alan C. Braddock and Renée Ater, “Art in the Anthropocene,” *American Art* 28, no. 3

(Fall 2014): 2–4; Alan C. Braddock, “From Nature to Ecology: The Emergence of Ecocritical Art History,” in *A Companion to American Art*, eds. John Davis, Jennifer A. Greenhill, and Jason D. LaFountain (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 447–67; Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher, eds., *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (Tuscaloosa: The University of

Alabama Press, 2009); Too numerous to list here, the growing quantity of environmentally-motivated exhibitions was noted by Murray Whyte, “At art museums, a season of environmental apocalypse,” *Boston Globe*, January 25, 2019; and Alina Tugend, “Can Art Help Save the Planet?” *New York Times*, March 12, 2019.

3 Jennifer Stettler Parsons, ed. *Flora/Fauna: The Naturalist Impulse in American Art*. With essays by Ellery Foutch and Amy Kurtz Lansing (Old Lyme, CT: Florence Griswold Museum, 2017).



Florence Griswold's boardinghouse, home of the Lyme Art Colony, played a unique role in that history by attracting environmentally-engaged artists to the site at the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ (Fig. 2) The Colony's founder, Henry Ward Ranger, was first drawn to Old Lyme, Connecticut, in 1899 by the area's forests filled with great, old trees that recalled those he had painted in the woodlands of Barbizon in France. Artist Arthur Heming described the Griswold House: "There amid a setting of sycamores, cedars, elms and willows, with a little brook in the foreground, I saw a charming house that appeared like a Roman temple among the trees."⁵ Other artists, particularly American Tonalists and Impressionists, came to immerse themselves in the varied ecology surrounding the boardinghouse, which was ripe for painting. (Fig. 3) In the morning artists could set off to scout views of the Lieutenant River or the nearby dairy and cattle farms, to sketch among the fruit trees in Miss Florence's orchard, or study floral specimens in her old-fashioned garden. In the

FIG 2 Unidentified artist, possibly Arthur Heming, painting beside the Florence Griswold House, ca. 1904. Photographs: Lyme Art Colony, Box 1, 70018.144, Lyme Historical Society Archives, Florence Griswold Museum

FIG 3 Female art student painting along the Lieutenant River, ca. 1904. Oversized Photographs Collection, Lyme Historical Society Archives, Florence Griswold Museum



afternoon they could enjoy opportunities to fish or birdwatch in the grassy meadow, or among the hedgerow and thickets.

At least a handful of Colony participants were artist-naturalists themselves. Most notable in this vein are Willard Metcalf, Harry Hoffman, and Childe Hassam.⁶ The artists appreciated the 'authentic,' or 'native,' feeling of rural New England where "every day [was] so in line with work," and felt productively distant from the urban art world.⁷ Still, in the evenings they benefited from the congenial gathering of like-minded personalities in the boardinghouse's dining room and parlor. Artists even used their talents to infuse the domestic space with nature by painting selected door panels with landscapes, seascapes, and pastoral animal scenes. Most impressively, members of the Colony painted the panels surrounding Florence Griswold's dining room to create an immersive experience. (Fig. 4) Lyme artists shared a dual interest in art and nature that was fostered by the distinct landscape and camaraderie of the Colony.

4 For more on the history of the Lyme Art Colony, see Jeffrey W. Andersen, "The Art Colony at Old Lyme," in *Connecticut and American Impressionism*. By Jeffrey W. Andersen, Susan G. Larkin, and Harold Spencer. Exh. Cat. The William Benton Museum of Art, Hurlburt Gallery, Greenwich, and Lyme Historical Society (Storrs: The University of Connecticut, 1980), 114–137.

5 Arthur Heming, *Miss Florence and the Artists of Old Lyme* (Old Lyme, CT: Florence Griswold Museum, 2013), 18.

6 See Amy Kurtz Lansing, "The Artist-Naturalist and American Impressionism," in *Flora/Fauna: The Naturalist Impulse in American Art*, ed. Jennifer Stettler Parsons (Old Lyme, CT: Florence Griswold Museum, 2017), 97–113.



The Florence Griswold Museum explored the context of this concept more broadly in the 2017 exhibition, *Flora/Fauna: The Naturalist Impulse in American Art*, which used permanent collection works and loans from public institutions and private individuals to survey the history of American artist-naturalists from the 18th- to the mid-20th century.⁸ That presentation had its genesis in one of the Museum's most amazing artifacts: a naturalist's cabinet



containing hundreds of bird eggs, butterflies, moths, and nests, assembled by Impressionist Willard Metcalf. (Fig. 5) Knowing the challenges for any exhibition to tell a complete story, we envisioned a sequel to explore how contemporary artists, in Connecticut and beyond, have continued the tradition. While *Flora/Fauna* examined the connections between the naturalist impulse, national identity, and the so-called wilderness in American landscape, this project explores the shift in American ideology—from the concept of a sublime, limitless nature to one that has turned fragile and in need of preservation.

7 Letter from Willard Metcalf to Florence Griswold, August 20, 1907. Florence Griswold Papers, Lyme Historical Society Archives, Florence Griswold Museum.

8 See note 3.

Drawing on conventions of the historic artist-naturalist but forging new paths, contemporary artists continue to incorporate and comment on nature in their art. Motivated by the inexorable rise of urban-industrial development and the subsequent worsening of our planet's condition, artists confront the vulnerability of the environment and the effects of global climate change to illustrate the continued relevance of ecology and nature conservation to artistic practice. *Fragile Earth* showcases the diverse approaches taken by ecologically concerned artists today through the work of four leading practitioners: Jennifer Angus, Mark Dion, Courtney Mattison, and James Prosek. They make natural elements their medium conceptually and literally, from prints created with eel bodies and sculpture incorporating taxidermy, to ceramic wall reliefs mimicking coral bleaching, cabinets filled with colorful plastic collected from local waters, and walls covered with shockingly beautiful, preserved insects. Together Angus, Dion, Mattison, and Prosek showcase the persuasive role art can play in advocating for the preservation of our earth.

These four artists were selected not only for the strength of their work and the environmental message of their practices, but also for the dialogue created by their works, which address a diverse array of environmental issues on land, in the air, and in the sea. In keeping with the exhibition's thesis, careful consideration was given to the ways in which these particular artists embody the continuation of the historic artist-naturalist tradition, as well as how their work relates to the history, collections, and landscape of the Museum's grounds. Building on the tradition begun by Florence Griswold, who welcomed artists to her boardinghouse,

FIG 4 View of Dining Room with painted panels, Florence Griswold Museum. Photograph by Joe Standart

FIG 5 Willard L. Metcalf, *Naturalist Collection Chest* (detail), ca. 1885–1925. Mahogany wood containing a collection of butterflies, moths, bird eggs, nests and supporting documents, Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Mrs. Henriette A. Metcalf

the Museum invited Angus, Dion, Mattison, and Prosek to create installations inspired by the landscape of the Connecticut coast and, when appropriate, in conversation with the historic site of the Lyme Art Colony. As artists aligned with environmental activism, they each uniquely transform natural and non-traditional materials, like insects, found debris, clay, and animals into art works that make visible the human role in global climate change. While they pursue diverse conceptual and material approaches to painting, sculpture, printmaking, and assemblage, their common passion for nature manifests in a shared aesthetic of abundance and detail, reflecting the overwhelming wonder of nature itself.

developed his love of nature through his childhood experiences exploring the pond and fields near his home, and in the salt marshes of Bridgeport and Stratford on Long Island Sound. His father, a self-taught naturalist, often engaged Prosek in birdwatching in the local meadows, orchards, and woods in their backyard. Today, he lives on the same street where he was raised and continues to take inspiration from the area for his art, as exemplified by his intimate watercolor studies. (Pls. [Field Study & Pond study]) The immediacy of their vibrant details reveals his affinity for close study and kinship with historic artist-naturalists like William Bartram and Fiedelia Bridges.

In his youth Prosek learned about Lyme Colony artists like Childe Hassam from the family library assembled by his father, which included a volume illustrating Hassam's watercolors of Celia Thaxter's garden on the Isles of Shoals.⁹ Prosek visited the Florence Griswold Museum as an adolescent, but was more familiar with Old Lyme as the home of Roger Tory Peterson, an environmentalist and author of popular bird books. Prosek's documentation of local botanicals in watercolors recalls the work of early 19th-century naturalists, but also links him to the study of flora and fauna in Old Lyme by artists such as the Willard Metcalf. Prosek reacquainted himself with the Museum during the planning of *Fragile Earth* and created a painting from specimens collected on site. (Figs. 6,7) The nut shell was picked up behind Florence Griswold's boardinghouse, where an old black walnut tree once stood. The grass and stone were found near the Lieutenant River.

Other paintings explore the play of light, color, and reflection on the surface of the pond near Prosek's home. (Pls. [Pond 1 & Pond 2])



JAMES PROSEK:
QUESTIONING NATURE'S NOMENCLATURE

The exhibition opens with a gallery installed by James Prosek (b. 1975), who embodies the continuation of the tradition of the historic artist-naturalist in Connecticut. An avid fisherman, skilled taxidermist, and prolific author, Prosek immerses himself in nature and follows in the footsteps of renowned naturalists like John James Audubon and Roger Tory Peterson. Growing up in Easton, Connecticut, Prosek

FIG 6
James Prosek on the Museum's grounds by the Lieutenant River, Old Lyme, Conn., May 2018

9 Celia Thaxter, *An Island Garden*. Pictures and Illuminations by Childe Hassam (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1894).



10 James Prosek, "A Botanist in Lapland," *New York Times*, May 21, 2017.

FIG 7
James Prosek, *Old Lyme Specimens, Winter*, 2019. Watercolor study, 16 x 7 3/4 in. Florence Griswold Museum, Purchase

The artist's connection to the place recalls Henry David Thoreau at Walden Pond, while the particular painting style resembles that of the Impressionists. Prosek has fished on this pond throughout his life and it has served as an important source for his scholarship on fish. He published his first book, *Trout: An Illustrated History*, at the age of nineteen while still an undergraduate at Yale. His third book followed in the footsteps of Izaak Walton, the 17th-century author of *The Compleat Angler*, a celebration of fishing and the environment. Today Prosek is a sought-after authority on fishing, with fourteen published books on art and nature. (Pls. [Striped Bass & Sea Bass]) His current book project focuses on how and why we name and order the natural world. He theorizes that once we name something "we've identified ourselves as the observer and the named thing as the observed—a barrier is placed between, lines are drawn. If I am observing, it suggests I am separate from nature, but in some of my best and most memorable moments I am part of it, when a certain amount of the knowing is shed."¹⁰

In other aspects of Prosek's *oeuvre* he updates conventional methods to consider how we engage with, identify, and categorize nature. His silhouette-style paintings reminiscent of field guides question the significance of naming and ordering nature, and the limitations of those divisions. (See Pls. [Warblers & Mural left & Mural right]) In series of paintings, prints, and sculptures, Prosek investigates the ways in which humans have insisted on shaping nature for our own needs, or have attempted to control or contain it, as in his works inspired by eels (Pls. [Eel wall; Eel print, Spears]), the *Myth of Order* series (Pls. [Myth of Order group; Myth square, heart, cycle]), and *Moth Cluster* series.

The *Moth Clusters* meditate on the concept of nature's holism, fluidity, and the problematic divisions people have imposed on it. Humans have drawn borders on land to create protected areas like national parks, but those lines are invisible to the animals who follow their instinct to migrate onto unprotected land. *Moth Cluster IV* (Pl. [_](#)) takes the example of army cutworm moths, whose swarms migrate from plains in Kansas and Nebraska to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem of Wyoming and Montana. In their larval stage in the Midwest the moths are considered an agricultural pest and are targeted with pesticides. Once in the mountainous West, however, they provide much-needed nourishment for grizzly bears in the high country (a single grizzly can eat up to 60,000 moths a day). If the moths don't make it to the mountains in sufficient numbers, the grizzlies need to look for food elsewhere, altering their habits and forcing them to lower elevations where they encounter more people. That humans focus their priorities on protecting discreet areas like national parks, defined by invisible lines, neglects the reality of nature's interconnectedness. Prosek challenges us to consider whether names and categories are truly helpful, or if they instead distort our understanding of nature's complexity.

These themes come to a head in the artist's "hybrid objects," which move beyond the natural world into a conceptual realm of fantasy, combining the real and imaginary. Prosek describes seemingly realistic hybrids such as his *Flying Squirrels* as "creatures that became their names in protest of being named."¹¹ (Pl. [\[Squirrels; Squirrels detail-optional\]](#)) Playing upon the linguistic constructs of their assigned name, the taxidermy squirrels wear the wings of a domestic quail (white) and a bufflehead duck

(brown). Prosek's use of taxidermy also alludes to the irony and tragedy within the naturalist tradition of killing animals in order to study them—naturalists retain the animals' bodies in order to examine them and prove their existence to others. With this genre Prosek also references an earlier era when myth and science were more closely aligned, and artists were tasked with creating images of fantastic animals by piecing together written and oral tales brought home by travelers. They also recall the hybrid creatures created for display in museums and sideshows, such as those of P.T. Barnum.

Other sculptures explore the artist's interest in mimics and forgeries. Nature's ability to camouflage itself and adapt to circumstances are some of its most magical qualities. In *Burned Bowl with Lemon Egg* Prosek substitutes the material of a delicate nest for heavy, indestructible bronze, cast to imitate charred wood. (Pl. [\[Burned Bowl\]](#)) An egg is replaced with a different object of similar shape and size. Does this substitution suggest a pun about making lemonade out of lemons? How will nature evolve to steel itself against the damage caused by human action? The resemblance of the bronze *Burned Log with Clay Flowers* to charred wood evokes familiar news images of the millions of wildfires that sweep the United States each year. (Pl. [\[Burned Log\]](#)) Studies show that forest fires today burn twice the area they did in 1970, with the average wildfire season lasting seventy-eight days longer.¹² Scientists have linked the severe heat and drought conditions that fuel wildfires to climate change. These conditions are only expected to grow warmer and drier as time marches on. The vibrant green, flowering plant sprouting from the burnt log reflects Prosek's belief in the resilience, will, and strength of

nature to persist despite all odds—suggesting that it is possible to break the downward spiral of climate change if humans can lessen the amount of greenhouse gas emissions entering the atmosphere. The black flower shows nature's artifice as well as its resilience—evolving to mimic its new surroundings.

Whether making paintings of specimens from life or conceiving of fantastical hybrids, Prosek's art reinforces the fact of the ecosystem's interconnectedness and encourages audiences to be mindful of our place within it. Despite grim environmental reports, he cites nature's endurance through earlier climate transformations and remains optimistic about its resilience.

COURTNEY MATTISON:

UNDERWATER WORLDS RISE TO THE SURFACE

Just as the Lieutenant and Connecticut Rivers feed into ocean waters via Long Island Sound, James Prosek's river-scene mural leads viewers into *Fragile Earth's* second gallery, where they descend to the depths of the Indo-Pacific Ocean floor with works by Courtney Mattison (b. 1985). (Pls. [\[Install view of Prosek mural showing Afterglow\]](#) [\[Install view of "Malum-Afterglow"\]](#)) A Los Angeles-based sculptor, Mattison handcrafts intricate and large-scale ceramic sculptures inspired by the beauty of marine ecosystems, particularly coral reefs, and the human-caused threats they face. (Fig. 8) An ocean advocate with interdisciplinary degrees in marine ecology, sculpture, and environmental studies, her installations visualize the effects of climate change on ocean life, such as coral bleaching due to warming waters and ocean acidification. While few of us encounter these marine environments in our daily lives or realize corals' significant contribution to the ecosystem, Mattison brings these issues into art gallery spaces with the goal of motivating the public and policy makers to conserve the seas. Just as early American naturalists recognized the expanded power of visual art over mere words to educate and inspire, Mattison aims to make scientific ideas more accessible by illustrating those concepts through the expressive beauty and drama of her stoneware creations. As the artist notes in her dialogue with scientist The Honorable Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., elsewhere in this volume, the alarming degradation of the ocean has been caused by human interference, including overfishing, carbon emissions from fossil fuel use, and chemical and plastic pollution. In *Fragile Earth* Mattison's installation



FIG 8 Courtney Mattison installing one her works. Photography by Arthur Evans

¹¹ James Prosek quoted in Allison Kemmerer, *A Field Guide to James Prosek: The Spaces In Between* (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, 2013), 23.

wildfires-and-climate-change/; *Climate Stabilization Targets: Emissions, Concentrations, and Impacts over Decades to Millennia* (National Research Council, 2011) <https://www.nap.edu/read/12877/chapter/5#39>.

¹² "Wildfires and Climate Change," Center for Climate Change and Energy Solutions <https://www.c2es.org/content/>

engages the subject of interconnected waterways, informing visitors of how local actions affect sea corals thousands of miles away.

Embodying many of the hallmarks of her practice, *Afterglow (Our Changing Seas VI)* (Pls. [Afterglow & details]) is the sixth work in a series exploring the rapid transition of coral reefs from healthy, colorful, and diverse to sickened and bleached. At its heart, this piece celebrates Mattison's favorite aesthetic aspects of a healthy coral reef, which is surrounded by the sterile white skeletons of bleached corals swirling like the rotating winds of a cyclone. The slightly brighter, less natural colors in *Afterglow* illustrate the phenomenon of fluorescence, in which corals sometimes create fluorescent protein in an effort to protect themselves from excessive heat and sunlight when they hover on the verge of bleaching. A bleached coral has lost its algae, and its skeleton becomes visible through its translucent skin. Corals typically die from bleaching because they starve to death and easily succumb to disease, however they can recover if the stressors subside and symbiotic algae recolonize them in time. Whether this sculpture represents a reef collapsing or recovering is up to the viewer, both conceptually and literally. If audiences act quickly to support environmental health and to slow climate change, then reefs may have a chance to regenerate, but doing nothing assures their demise. Scientists predict that if current trends continue reefs will cease to exist as functional ecosystems by the end of the century.¹³

For *Fragile Earth* Mattison created new works that imagine other scenarios for sick and damaged reefs. The artist hand-works the clay to create complex textures that mimic

compromised reefs, using glazes containing chemicals similar to those precipitated by coral animals in ocean waters. Impaired sea sponges can grow more quickly, causing them to regenerate in dense, colorful masses. While a diversity of life characterizes a healthy ocean, the repetitive mass of tubular sponges in *Texture Study I* imagines the dangerous homogenization that could take place on the sea floor if other species went extinct. (Pls. [Texture Study & details]) Relatedly, *Malum Geminos* illustrates the disintegration of bleached corals caused by warming and acidic waters. (Fig. 9 & Pls. [Malum Geminos; details]) Corals face additional threats by dynamite fishing; from boats and cruise ships that collide with reefs, drop anchors, trash, or spill oil; damage from the poison in some sunscreen chemicals; even plunder by tourists eager for a souvenir, or poachers who sell them in shops. Together these hazards are destroying ecosystems that took centuries to develop, as most established reefs are between 5,000 and 10,000 years old.¹⁴ While designers adore the aesthetic quality of white coral forms for their muted colors and interesting textures, tragically, they are actually skeletons that exemplify the death of ocean life.

The medium and method of Mattison's sculpture directly relate to its environmental subject and message —the vast, delicate ceramic works emblemize the equally fragile coral reefs which face enormous threats. (Pl. [Courtney in studio]) As she describes:

I enjoy feeling like a coral, patiently and methodically constructing large, delicate, stony structures that can change an ecosystem. I use simple tools like chopsticks and paint brushes to sculpt and texture each

¹³ Scott F. Heron, C. Mark Eakin, Fanny Douvère, et al. *Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Coral Reefs: A First Global Scientific Assessment*. (Paris, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2017), 9. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1676/>.

¹⁴ "How Coral Reefs Grow," Coral Reef Alliance, <https://coral.org/coral-reefs-101/coral-reef-ecology/how-coral-reefs-grow/>.

¹⁵ Courtney Mattison, Artist Statement, <https://courtneymattison.com/about>.



*piece by hand — often poking thousands of holes to mimic the repetitive growth of coral colonies. Individual coral polyps precipitate calcium carbonate from seawater to form stony skeletons that, over time, grow atop one another to compose the vast, complex structures we know as reefs. It therefore feels essential that the medium of my work be ceramic, as calcium carbonate also happens to be a common ingredient in clay and glaze materials. Not only does the chemical structure of my work parallel that of a natural reef, but brittle ceramic anemone tentacles and coral branches break easily if improperly handled, similar to the delicate bodies of living reef organisms.*¹⁵

FIG 9 Courtney Mattison with her work, *Malum Geminos*, 2019. Glazed stoneware and porcelain, 84 x 250 x 22 in., Courtesy of the artist

The artist crafts her works with an environmental awareness of her materials, process, and the energy from natural resources involved in making her art. She purchases bulk and local materials and fires only full kilns.

Extensive fieldwork has informed Mattison's expertise in ocean ecology. On excursions to such places as Indonesia and Australia, she scuba dives often in order to view firsthand the glowing colors and exquisite details of coral animals, references she transfers into her sculpture. Her direct observation of ocean life recalls that of Lyme artist Harry Hoffman (1871–1964), who excelled in marine painting and accompanied renown naturalist William Beebe (1877–1962) on expeditions to Bermuda,

the Galápagos, and British Guiana (now Guyana).¹⁶ (Fig. 11, Pl. [Beebe's expedition team]) Mattison also works with Mission Blue,



an ocean conservation organization founded by renowned oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle, and has joined scientists on various expeditions to raise awareness about

plastic pollution and overfishing, document marine science in action, and to witness melting glaciers in the Norwegian Arctic.

Mattison's involvement with Mission Blue inspired her ceramic series *Hope Spots*, which in her words "celebrates the beauty and value of places that need our protection now more than ever." (See Fig. [Coral Triangle in Dialogue] & Pls. [Micronesia Islands; Coral Sea; Sargasso]) Earle coined this term for marine areas that are especially critical to ocean health in her 2009 TED Prize talk, advocating for an ocean equivalent to national parks on land.¹⁷ Today there are over one hundred Hope Spots (including one off the coast of Cape Cod), with more nominations under consideration. Each of the artist's *Hope Spots* is a sculptural vignette of a marine ecosystem that is especially valuable and in need of protection. While many of these locations may seem remote to American audiences, Mattison's sculptures endeavor to inform viewers about our impact on these places. The disposal of plastic locally can allow it to amass in immense garbage patches in the middle of the ocean, posing risks to marine animals, including coral.¹⁸

Coral Sea II references the diversity of corals encompassing the Great Barrier Reef, located off

the northeastern coast of Australia, which is the world's largest barrier reef and in recent years has experienced devastating coral bleaching. (Pl. [Coral Sea II]) The Coral Sea Marine Park is one of Earth's largest protected areas. A lesser known area is commemorated in *Sargasso Sea II*, a circulating gyre that makes up almost two-thirds of the North Atlantic Ocean, and is unique as the world's only sea without a coastline. (Pl. [Sargasso Sea II]) Mattison's delicate clay work reflects how brown Sargassum seaweed accumulates as "floating reefs." This "golden rainforest of the sea" serves as an important habitat to such iconic animals as Bluefin tuna, sea turtles, and eels (the fish in the Sargasso closest to Prosek's heart).¹⁹

Courtney Mattison harnesses the power of life-like scale, color, and texture in her work to appeal to audiences on an emotional level. In order to save reefs, the artist hopes that audiences will engage in a phenomenological experience with her work that will enable them to internalize the challenges endangered reefs are experiencing due to the ramifications of human actions, and spur them to action.

**MARK DION:
ENGAGING THE CULTURE OF NATURE**

Visitors return to solid ground in the third gallery of *Fragile Earth*, installed by Mark Dion (b. 1961). Growing up in the area of the historic whaling town of New Bedford, Massachusetts, Dion witnessed the displacement of nature in and around his hometown by commercial development. These early experiences materialized into artworks in the 1980s and 1990s, when he began honing a conceptual practice of institutional critique that offered commentary on humans' treatment of the

16 Charles William Beebe (1877–1962) conducted numerous expeditions as curator for the New York Zoological Society and famously used his Bathysphere to explore ocean depths. Harry Hoffman, who served as one of Beebe's marine artists, first used a water glass (a glass-bottomed bucket) to view the undersea, and later a boat with a glass bottom like those designed for

tourists. See Kurtz Lansing, "The Artist-Naturalist and American Impressionism," 106. For more on Hoffman, see Jeffrey W. Andersen, *Harry L. Hoffman: A World of Color* (Old Lyme, CT: Florence Griswold Museum, 1988).

17 Sylvia Earle, "My wish: Protect our oceans," TED Prize Talk, February 2009,

https://www.ted.com/talks/sylvia_earle_s_ted_prize_wish_to_protect_our_oceans.

18 For more information, see <https://mission-blue.org/hope-spots/>.

19 Sylvia Earle coined the phrase "golden rainforest of the sea" for the Sargasso Sea, <https://mission-blue.org/category/sargasso-sea/>.

11



environment. Dion recognized that the artist must be an agitator, interrogating the dominant culture and challenging perception, prejudice, and convention. (Pls. [Bone Coral & Nature Morte]) Pioneering an interdisciplinary approach that combines installation, appropriation, and performance art with scientific methodologies, Dion has spent his career out "in the field" studying nature, collecting, and embarking on expeditions that follow the tracks of historic artist-naturalists. Based in upstate New York, Dion undertakes diverse projects that examine the ways in which public institutions construct an understanding of history and the natural world. Often working inside their ranks, Dion curates museum collections into new site-specific installations that mix historic objects with his creations, as he has at the Florence Griswold Museum, in order to bring attention to the culture

of nature. (Fig. 11) Many of the works he chose for *Fragile Earth* deal with the apparatus of nature study, hunting, and collecting. The artist describes his outlook as realistic, acknowledging that there is little positive news about the environment's decline.

Throughout his career, Dion has stepped into the role of various historic naturalists including William Beebe (1992), Alfred Russel Wallace (1994), Alexander Wilson (1999), and William Bartram (2008) to create installations inspired by their pursuits. For an exhibition at Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia, Dion retraced William Bartram's (1739–1823) exploratory journey from the Carolinas to Northern Florida using his travel journals, drawings, and maps. (Pl. [Bartram Piece]) Navigating by car instead of horseback and with the help of artist Dana Sherwood, Dion collected plant and animal specimens, water

FIG 10 Harry Hoffman, *A Coral Cave*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 20 x 32 in. Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Carolyn Zeleny

FIG 11 Mark Dion with assistant Julie Weaver in William Chadwick's Studio, Florence Griswold Museum, October 2018

samples, and thousands of objects. These were shipped back to the museum to be part of an exhibition in the historic home of John Bartram, the famous botanist and father of William. Of course, the landscape had changed drastically since William traversed it in the 1770s. In place of marshes and forests, Dion and Sherwood encountered suburban real estate developments, theme parks, and highways. Dion recorded his experiences in drawings, writings, photographs, and video as a means of documenting his performance art for posterity. The artist created the installation *Travels of William Bartram Reconsidered (equipment)* (2008) from the objects he carried with him on the expedition. He explains, "I'm definitely a lover of things, and a true believer that things speak."²⁰

Some of the equipment from Dion's Bartram expedition seems as if it could have served as models for the portfolio *Apparatus* (2018), which trains our eyes on the tools of the naturalist, encouraging us to consider the implications of how they are used. (Pls. [Apparatus]) Some of the items Dion depicts aid in wayfinding, measuring, and observing nature. But at the same time, these tools can be used to disarm, capture, and preserve nature. While Enlightenment-era expeditions sought to classify unknown terrains, they also contributed to a process of colonial settlement that ultimately displaced native people, spread slavery, and negatively impacted wildlife.

Dion's *Hunting Standards (felt)* (2012) were produced for a series of exhibitions called *Concerning Hunting*, in which he examined "hunting as a cultural practice that is rich in traditions, passionately pursued, and highly controversial."²¹ (Pl. [Hunting Standards]) Motivated by hunting's fundamental

contradiction—that the price for documenting and understanding nature most often comes at the cost of killing animals—the artist's goal for the project was to "walk a tightrope" between the positions of animal rights activists and those of hunters, as he himself empathizes with both sides.²² One can imagine the banner-like images adorning hunting lodges filled with trophies. While they evoke flags of conquest, their cartoonish style introduces an element of irony. Dion asks viewers to consider the significance of the hunting tradition, and why humans have felt endowed with the right to inflict violence on other species.

Dion characterizes his projects as "not really about nature but rather they are about ideas about nature."²³ Like his friend and fellow artist James Prosek, he questions the ways in which humans have attempted to understand nature by breaking it down into units or systems for convenient comprehension. Dion's work often investigates the visual representation of nature. In *300 Million Years of Flight* (2012), he uses silhouettes to illustrate the history of aviation. (See Fig. [in Dion/Prosek Dialogue]) As a tool of depiction, the silhouette has a long and culturally varied history. It retains close ties to the mythological origin of art. Pliny the Elder wrote in his *Natural History* (ca. 77–79 AD) that art "originated in tracing lines round the human shadow."²⁴ In the 19th century, profile portraits cut from black paper became economical and easily-reproduced alternatives to painted portraits. Within the context of natural history, silhouettes are used as illustrative keys to dioramas in natural history museums, and as devices for field guide artists like Roger Tory Peterson (1908–1996), who advocated for identifying species from afar without killing them.

20 Mark Dion quoted in Mimi Vu, "Artful and Stunning Cabinets of Curiosities, Decoded," *New York Times*, February 25, 2016.

21 Dieter Buchhart and Verena Gamper, Mark Dion: *Concerning Hunting* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), 4.

22 Mark Dion, "The Miscellany Interview. Mark Dion in conversation with Roel Arkesteijn, 2013–2017," in *The Incomplete Writings of Mark Dion: Selected Interviews, Fragments, and Miscellany*, ed. Roel Arkesteijn (Fieldwork Museum, 2017), 23.

23 Mark Dion, "CalArts application, 2001," in *The Incomplete Writings of Mark Dion*, 8.

24 Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, trans. Henry T. Riley (London: Bohn's Classical Library, 1855), <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:latinLit:phi0978.phi001.perseus-eng1:35.5>.

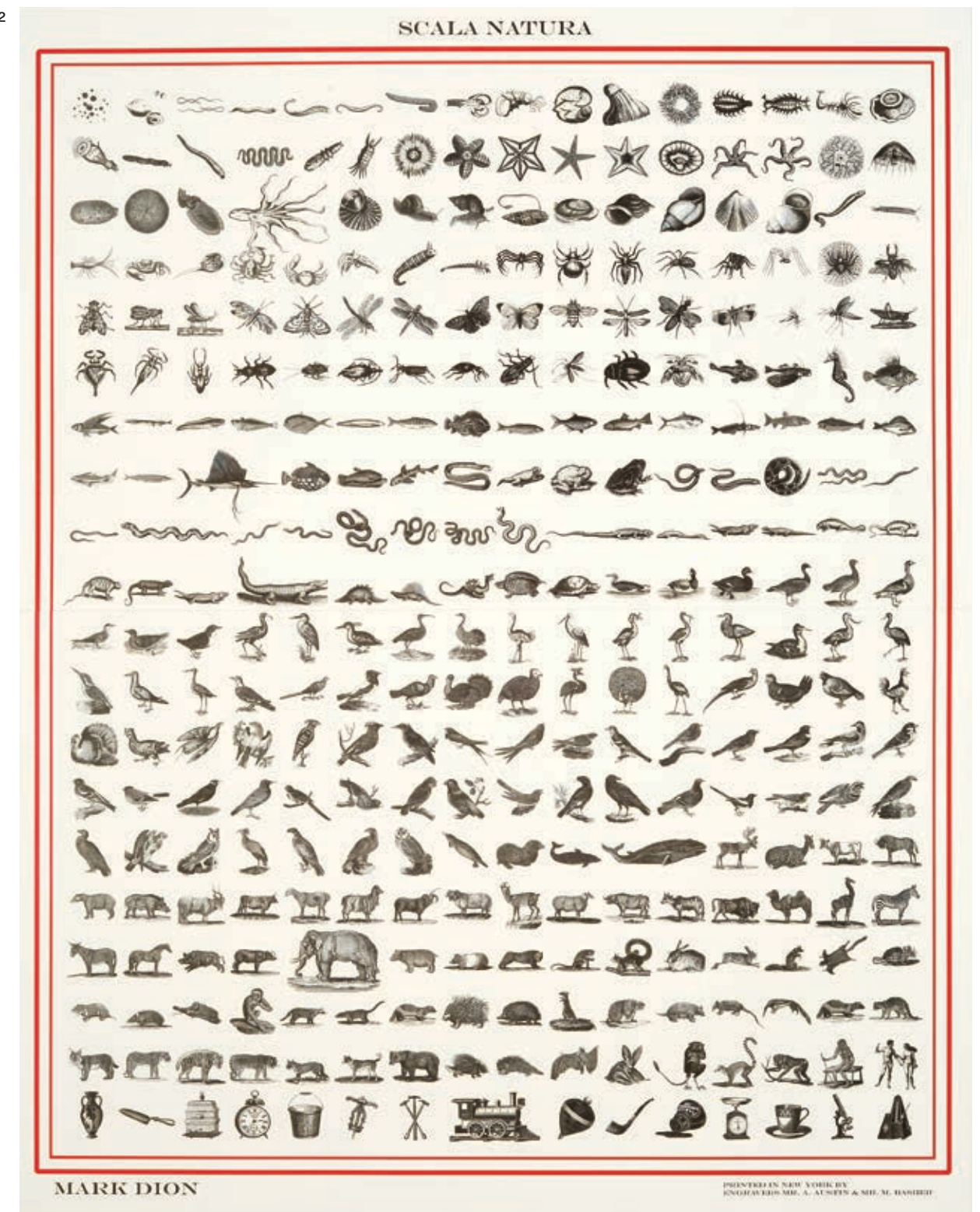


FIG 12 Mark Dion, *Scala Natura*, 2008. Offset color lithography, 50 1/2 x 40 in. Edition of 40, IAP, Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles

In a different way, the military utilizes silhouettes to identify flying aircrafts. Their outlines also recall firearm targets for hunters. While nature and civilization are often seen as separate, Dion's composition levels those differences by emphasizing what these silhouettes have in common—the ability to fly. His juxtaposition of dinosaurs, planes, birds, and missiles points to how nature and culture must share the sky.

Scala Natura exemplifies Dion's critique of the systems invented for organizing natural history. (Fig. 12) Translating to "ladder of nature," the title refers to the classification scheme proposed by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. His "Great Chain of Being" organized living things with plants and inanimate matter at the bottom and mankind at the top. This hierarchy, Dion explains, "justified the domination of nature and of people over other people, and it makes that domination feel God-given, the natural order of things."²⁵ While Aristotle ranked the world's elements from least to most significant, Dion's grid-like composition posits a less hierarchical structure and, in a sense, turns the historical ladder on its head. Dion's images guide the viewer on a narrative journey beginning with microorganisms and sea life, followed by insects and creatures that swim, crawl, fly, and walk. Near the bottom, Adam and Eve (appropriated from a 1504 print by Albrecht Dürer) appear near man-made objects and tools, perhaps suggesting humans' attempts to master nature, or perhaps how human inventions might outlive or even come to dominate their makers. The last item, a metronome, marks time at a selected rate by producing a regular, audible tick as determined by its operator. By ending on this device Dion points to the variability of how humans measure time, organize it, and dictate their own fates.

Appropriating additional historical prototypes, as well as creating his own, *World in a Box* offers twenty-seven ironic, humorous, and metaphorical prints charting the study of nature and how it interfaces with other forms of culture, including histories of science, art, and the humanities. (Pl. [World in a Box]) Throughout, the artist reminds audiences that the concept of nature is an inherently subjective and anthropocentric (human-focused) construct, as is our understanding of it. Some of Dion's diagrams illustrate natural specimens as devices for qualification or measurement, and others comment on humans' careless treatment of nature's resources. In one print, called "Death of a Giant," the cross-section of a tree trunk's growth rings serves as a timeline for significant historical events, but the artist notes that its life was ended to serve the trivial purpose of a picnic table. By adding that coda, Dion suggests how paradoxical it is that we cut down trees in order to sit among them.

Another section of the gallery brings Dion's work in conversation with the Florence Griswold Museum's collection through selected permanent collection objects. Willard Metcalf's historic naturalist cabinet, which was the catalyst for this exhibition and its prequel, sits in conversation with Dion's contemporary cabinet. (Pls. [Dion curates the collection]) Metcalf's drawers of natural specimens are accompanied by paintings by the aforementioned Lyme artist-naturalist Harry Hoffman. Dion's interests connect with Hoffman via the historical naturalist William Beebe, after whom Dion has conducted several projects. For *Fragile Earth* Dion selected from the Museum's archives some of the cards and drawings Beebe sent to Hoffman, complementing a presentation of field guides authored by Dion over his career, and

²⁵ Mark Dion quoted in Susan Dunne, "Artist Pokes Fun at 'Great Chain of Being' with New Wadsworth Exhibit," CT Now, October 1, 2015.

his book, *Fragments of Travel, Exploration and Adventure*. (Pls. [Beebe Archival Materials] [Field Guides] [Fragments of Travel]) Taken together, the pieces in this gallery exemplify Mark Dion's exceptional ability to merge historical methods with contemporary practices for the sake of the environment's future, and to blur the boundaries between art, science, and everyday life.

JENNIFER ANGUS:

FANTASY OPENS A WINDOW ON REALITY

The final section of *Fragile Earth* takes place in Florence Griswold's historic boardinghouse, where visitors encounter a fantastical transformation of the Museum's period rooms installed by artist Jennifer Angus (b. 1961). (Fig. 13) Arriving through the side porch door, as Lyme Colony artists did at the turn of the century, viewers are met with over one thousand preserved insects arranged by Angus throughout the first floor. (Pls. [Hallway_01, _02]) A Professor of Design Studies at the University of Wisconsin-

Madison, Angus specializes in working with exotic insects as her medium, pinning them to walls in ornamental patterns reminiscent of textiles, and arranging them in anthropomorphic poses under glass bell jars or in cabinet drawers. (Fig. 14) Her installations create surprising beauty while also informing audiences of insects' importance to the ecosystem. They pollinate food crops, control parasites and predators, produce silk, dyes, and honey, and decompose matter back into the soil. Like a historic artist-naturalist living in the modern era, Angus collects these specimens in an ecologically sound manner, obtaining many from insect farms, primarily in Malaysia, Madagascar, and Papua New Guinea. The artist considers the insects to be "ambassadors for their species."²⁶ She uses the insects over and over again, carefully pinning them in storage boxes for safe keeping, repairing them when broken, or inventing new creative ways to display them. While none of the species she uses are endangered, their habitats—mainly

13



²⁶ Author's conversation with the artist, March 2019.

FIG 13
Jennifer Angus installing her *Insect Wallpaper* in the Florence Griswold House, May 2019



forests—have been under assault for decades. As Angus has written, “forests play second fiddle to human demands for agriculture and urbanization. Intellectually we recognize that forests are the lungs of the planet but not enough is being done to protect this precious resource. Virtually every insect on the endangered species list is there because of loss of habitat.”²⁷ The artist hopes that her audiences’ experience with her work will inspire consideration of their own behavior and its impact on the environment, prompting them to become involved in conservation efforts, such as rain forest protection projects.

History, narrative, and fantasy play important roles in Angus’s work. Her most significant inspiration comes from the Victorian period, an era of great collecting when styles from across the globe were layered into incredibly designed, eclectic interiors. Finding excitement in contrasting patterns, historic interiors are the artist’s preferred venues for commissions. As such, the 1817 Georgian-style Griswold House, whose appearance reflects its interpretation as a boardinghouse circa 1910, represents an ideal muse and setting for an artistic intervention produced for the cause of environmental awareness. For three months Angus joined the Museum as its inaugural Artist-in-Residence to familiarize herself with the Colony, the house’s architecture and collection, and to begin constructing her work on site. She conceived of a “lost chapter” of Colony history written by artist and memoirist Arthur Heming (reproduced in this volume) which imagines the artists staging an insect-themed party in the boardinghouse inspired by the naturalist impulse of Metcalf and others.

Throughout the Griswold House’s first floor period rooms Angus inserts elements related to

FIG 14
Jennifer Angus, Insect Bell Jar installed at the Florence Griswold Museum, 2019

²⁷ Jennifer Angus, Artist Statement, www.jenniferangus.com.

the Lyme artists’ merrymaking. Entering through the hallway, where Miss Florence historically displayed paintings for sale, Angus presents her *Insect Wallpaper* as a festive embellishment. (PI. [Insect wallpaper]) Its concentric circles of insects include cicadas, purple-winged grasshoppers, moving leaf insects, and katydids. Punctuating the pattern are gold-framed half domes encasing additional species, combined with mixed-media elements like cast beeswax and natural plant matter. In the parlor, nearly thirty Victorian glass domes glitter with insects posed to interact with curiosities. (PIs. [Parlor]) Green beetles appear to march upward from behind the piano in a geometric pattern perfectly aligned with the historic wallpaper. (PI. [Parlor BeetleWallpaper--will all details be numbered?]) Concentric rings of insects hang encased by a half dome above the fireplace, while additional entomological prints adorn the interior. In the Artist’s Bedroom, Angus’s numerous curio cases are stacked around the room, blending almost seamlessly with Lyme Colony artifacts. (PIs. [ArtistsBedroom]) Paper wasps’ nests rest on furniture and hang from an artist’s easel. In various repurposed cigar boxes (ca. 1910) an anonymous amateur’s insect collection lines the mantelpiece. Around the corner, Miss Florence’s bedroom has become the staging area for guests to don their costumes, including insect-shaped papier-mâché masks and antique-style driving goggles, which were worn by the male party guests to simulate the appearance of flies. (PIs. [FlorenceBedroom]) A “swarm” of cicadas has landed on the upper corner of Miss Florence’s floral wallpaper. (PI. [Swarm folder w details]) On the bed, a suitcase opens to reveal some “secrets” of Angus’s practice, including a vial of cochineal insects (whose ground-

up bodies produce a berry-colored dye), and examples of how the insects arrive via mail order wrapped in plastic. (PI. [FlorenceBedroomDetail]) The centerpiece of the room is the magnificent costume of Florence Griswold herself—a green velvet cape decorated by the artist with hand-dyed, custom-made silk flowers and embroidered by Angus with iridescent green beetle wings. (PI. [FlorenceBedroomShawlDetail]) On Florence’s bedside table, a Victorian book bears the title *Silver Wings and Golden Scales*, which the artist adapted for her installation. Angus has lined the pantry just outside the bedroom with glowing jelly jars filled with “insect preserves” which, she explains in her narrative, were created as party favors. (PI. [PantryJars]) In the dining room a feast awaits on the table, comprised of a “wasp-nest roast” and memento mori still lifes of breads, where the insects are already helping themselves. (PIs. [Dining Room details]) Additional “insect preserves” line window shelves, creating a golden, Tonalist ambience appropriate for the Lyme Colony, perfumed with the sweet aroma of honey and beeswax. (PI. [DiningRoomWindow])

Returning to the main hall, viewers find a magnificent finale in the form of a 104-drawer cabinet of curiosities created by Angus during her residency. (PI. [Cabinet]) In the tale written for the Museum, the artist asks her audience to imagine that Lyme artists and other guests filled the drawers of an old hardware cabinet as a collaborative contribution to the party decor. Peering into each of the drawers reveals episodic fantasies of insects reading miniature books, playing games, making meals of other insects, contemplating mysterious keys, and conversing with taxidermy toads. (PIs. [Cabinet Drawers folder details]) The anthropomorphism

of the insects, ensconced as they are in drawers, domes, or pinned to walls, functions on multiple levels. The artist hopes that audiences' encounter with the beautiful insects as *beings* generates empathy for these species which do us so much good, but to whom we have not returned the favor.

Insects are most commonly associated with unsanitary conditions, disease, intrusion, or destruction—like biting fleas, mosquitos, textile-eating moths, or wood-eating termites. Angus takes these much-disliked species and seeks to rehabilitate their reputation, transforming them with her skills of selection, arrangement, and narrative creativity. Recognizing that it's easier for activists to garner attention for larger endangered species like whales, or cuddly-looking tigers that remind us of domesticated pets, Angus encourages us to ask 'who will look out for the importance of smaller species?'—the less-traditionally loveable animals, like bees, which have a reputation for stinging people, but serve as the world's most important pollinator of food crops? It is estimated that one third of the food we consume each day relies on pollination by bees, other insects, as well as birds, and bats.²⁸ As one scientist put it, "They are the invisible force working throughout the world to keep it running."²⁹ Without insects our ecosystem would literally collapse (and some argue it is already collapsing), but despite our dependence on insects, consider how we've treated them—as pests and villains. Angus's fantasies open a window on this reality of nature by inviting viewers to reconsider their ideas about insects as well as our own consumption of natural resources. For Jennifer Angus and those exposed to her art, insects become ornament and ambassadors for environmental protection.

The conversion from "pest" to gem occurs through the power of design.

ALIGNING ART WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

Jennifer Angus, Mark Dion, Courtney Mattison, and James Prosek have much in common with the artists who joined the Colony at Florence Griswold's boardinghouse at the turn of the twentieth century. The most significant work of art Lyme artists left behind is the historic house itself, decorated by them with paintings on wall panels in the dining room and door panels throughout the first floor. The paintings create an effect that extends the landscape from the outdoors into domestic space, enabling the artist-boarders to remain immersed in nature even while taking meals inside the house. Fusing art and nature, the painters created an atmosphere that paid homage to the natural environment. In this spirit, Angus asked her fellow *Fragile Earth* artists to devise designs for the panels of the fireplace mantels in the period rooms. (Pls. [Mantels 4 rooms]) The result is a truly special fusion of past and present artists and artwork aligned with both this place and the natural world.

These four contemporary artists embark on similar goals as their artist-naturalist predecessors, updated for the twenty-first century. They continue to cover the walls, though the message and the materials have evolved. James Prosek's silhouette murals create an immersive experience that appropriates past practices but leave audiences looking for answers about the future. Mattison's monumental ceramic sculptures evoke marine environments most people will never see in person, and yet the ocean's health depends on reefs' survival. Dion's cabinets function as

miniature museums within the museum, creating unexpected juxtapositions between historical artifacts and ordinary trash. Instead of paint or clay, Angus covers her walls with insects, which would never survive the threats of fly-swatters or pesticides without the protection of the gallery setting. Encountering the complex layers of these installations yields a transformative experience. The ingredients and processes utilized by these artists test the boundaries of fine art and its relationship to everyday life, but in doing so they implore us to be more in tune with how our actions correlate to the environment's preservation. Many of the displays leave the narrative's ending unresolved, and instead pose questions to the viewer: Why have humans sought to categorize, name, and contain nature as we have? Is the reef recovering or collapsing? Are the collections housed by the cabinets of curiosity celebrations or memorials? Will our generation experience an insect apocalypse? The meaning of the artwork and the fate of the environment is in the hands of the world's citizens.

Angus, Dion, Mattison, and Prosek combine elements of the real and imagined to appeal to our emotions and to approximate the vast wonder of nature. Some of their pieces occupy the realm of fantasy, and still, the ideas and materials keep us rooted in the physical world, and in the truth that climate change is real and the environment is degrading at an alarming rate. They are not just interested in science or natural history singularly, but in its cultural organization, how we classify life forms, how we treat them, and how we thus determine the fate of all of earth's creatures. What these artists' contributions make clear is that the environmental crisis is not just a science problem, it is everyone's problem. Their work

reveals that we are all connected. The hierarchy of life is a myth that needs to be debunked. To mistreat the environment and its creatures is to ultimately do harm to ourselves. Our current condition reveals that not everyone has seen it that way, but with these artists' immersive installations alerting us to our perilous state, perhaps the tide will turn.

28 A.M. Klein, et. al., *Importance of crop pollinators in changing landscapes for world crops*. Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences 274 (2007), 303–313. Accessed via <https://pollinator.org/pollinators>.

nationalgeographic.com/2017/08/insect-bug-medicine-food-macneal/.

29 Simon Worrall, "Without Bugs, We Might All Be Dead," *National Geographic*, August 6, 2017, <https://news>.

In Search of Nature

Mark Dion and James Prosek



FIG 1
Detail of James Prosek's installation of hand-forged iron eel spears in *Fragile Earth* at the Florence Griswold Museum, 2019

MARK DION You and I are both products of New England. (Fig. 2) There is a great deal of our work in New England and a good amount of New England in our work. As an artist who negotiates nature and the culture of nature, how do you think the very particular landscape and environmental history of New England has shaped your practice?

JAMES PROSEK I find myself beginning a narrative about my own creative journey with my father's story—each time I write it down, or tell it aloud, I discover something in it. My father grew up in Santos, Brazil, and moved to this country with his family when he was twelve, settling in New Rochelle, New York. As a child in Brazil his first love was for birds—he and his brother trapped live birds and kept them in cages on the veranda of their home—and when he moved to this country he brought that love of birds with him. On the ship from Brazil to New York he discovered his second love—for the sea and the night sky. Years later he went to a maritime college on the East River called Fort Schuyler and worked in the Merchant Marine shipping cargo around the world. Around the time he decided with my mother to have a family, he became a schoolteacher, teaching earth science and astronomy, and ended up moving to southwestern Connecticut. He fell in love with the region known as New England and often talked about how special it was to him. By deciding to settle in New England, he of course influenced the direction of my life and work, simply because it's where I was born. He absorbed the ethos of the place through its art and literature and landscape.

It was not hard to find an allegory for my father's conversion to New Englander. His favorite birds, warblers, were, like him, tropical migrants—they spent their winters in Central and South America and in the summer migrated to New England to nest and feed in hardwood and pine forests from Connecticut to Maine. (Fig. 3) My father had simply migrated like the birds he loved, but for him it was a one-way and not a roundtrip journey.

Like you, Mark, I was influenced as a kid by encounters with nature in books—like field guides or the works of painters and photographers—and by direct experiences in nature itself. My dad was a kind of self-taught naturalist and always had a pile of books on the glass table in our living room from which he learned the names of the local trees and insects and birds, and he in turn taught these names to me.

Our shelves were stacked with Golden Field Guides and Roger Tory Peterson field guides, and my father checked out books from the library on Audubon, Louis



FIG 2
Tag with handwriting by James Prosek noting that he collected this hand-forged eel spear "on a trip with Mark Dion to the Whaling Museum...." in New Bedford, MA, August 12, 2014

Agassiz Fuertes, Winslow Homer, and Eliot Porter. Specifically, relevant to the Florence Griswold Museum, he had a book of watercolors that Childe Hassam had made in Celia Thaxter's garden on the Isles of Shoals, off the coast of New Hampshire. We visited the Florence Griswold Museum when I was little. However, I knew Old Lyme not so much as the heart of American Impressionism, but as the town where the famous bird artist Roger Tory Peterson lived. Years later I had a chance to meet him when he lectured at Yale. I asked him to sign our family copy of his *Field Guide to the Birds*. The works of these New England artists and photographers had an enormous influence on me.

I made drawings from books, copying Homer's watercolors from Maine and the Adirondacks, and works by Edward Hopper, and Andrew Wyeth from the coast of New England. At the same time, my father was reading works by New England authors and poets, in particular Henry David Thoreau, Robert Frost, and Emily Dickinson. I made an illustrated book (hand-typed on a typewriter and with hand-sewn pages) of Dickinson's poems as a child.

My father had not been introduced to any of this art or poetry in school or by his parents, but had learned about it largely through weekly trips to our town library. Perhaps the greatest gift he gave me growing up was the confidence to be self-taught. He said that you could learn just about anything from books.

Besides mucking around in the pond across the street from our home or in the salt marshes in Bridgeport and Stratford on Long Island Sound, or bird watching in the meadows or orchards in our town, one activity I engaged in with my father brought me particularly close to the woods behind our home. In the seventies there was an energy crisis and oil prices surged. To save money—we were living on a single teacher's salary—my father put a wood stove in our house and learned to cut down trees with a chainsaw, hand split, and stack wood. He heated the house exclusively with wood throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Cutting, collecting,



FIG 3
James Prosek, *Avian Composition with Warblers*, 2018. Acrylic on panel
46 x 46 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York

splitting, stacking, and burning wood was a big part of my childhood, an activity we did as a family—my dad, sister, and mother in my early years.

I can remember the smell of the chainsaw running and gasoline and chain oil on my dad's hands and clothing, and the smells of different trees as they were first cut into, sawed, and split. Red oak we called "piss oak" because it had a strong odor like urine. And, of course, I remember the scent of the wood itself burning in the winter. This was all part of a wonderful and memorable experience interacting with trees. Fueling the home with wood, my father said, "warms you twice"—once when you were splitting it, and once when burning it (an old New England proverb that Thoreau invokes in *Walden*). The nature I grew up in was not just there to be looked at, but to be used—harvested, caught, hunted, burned. It was a complex engagement on many levels.

I can't talk about my upbringing in New England without mentioning another important early mentor of mine, a game warden named Joe Haines. I met him when I was fourteen and he caught me and a friend fishing illegally in a local drinking water reservoir (I later wrote a book about our friendship called *Joe & Me*). Joe (now in his eighties) embodies the New England Yankee—frugal, subsistence farmer, trapper, hunter, gatherer, fisherman. He augmented the things I learned from my father related to birds and splitting wood and knowledge of native plants. Joe illuminated the pre-colonial history of the land and took me to places near the reservoir that he told me had once been camps where native peoples lived, under large ledges, and by streams, where they made spearpoints and other stone tools. He introduced me to a fish I had completely ignored, the freshwater eel, whose relentless nature and resilience came to influence my world view, my art, and my writing. The eel is a survivor, a nearly indestructible fish that migrates from our ponds and lakes and streams to spawn in a warm womb in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean called the Sargasso Sea. The beautiful and utilitarian objects associated with eel fishing in New England and Long Island, particularly hand-forged iron spears and woven traps, have also influenced my work. (Fig. 1)

The creature I worshipped most as a child was a colorful and diminutive native fish that lived in our cold New England streams—the brook trout, technically a close relative of the Arctic Char. I fished for them and drew and painted them in watercolors. The brook trout is a fragile but resilient fish—a survivor of major climatic changes, including the last glaciation over 13,000 years ago. It buries its eggs in the gravel on the stream bottom in the fall, and so the young hatch from stones in spring. I always found something remarkable in this—that they rely on rock as a material for their reproductive lives.

The stone walls I can see out the window of my studio are reminders too, of what the glaciers left behind when they melted. Connecticut is choked with rocks. You can't dig a hole without pulling rocks of all sizes from the soil. The stone walls which I have

always admired have become an important metaphor for me, related to my lifelong inquiry into how and why we name and order nature—about how humans have to divide a continuum into pieces in order to talk about it with language, and how that propensity to draw lines shapes how we perceive nature.

As an admirer of your work and kindred spirit, I first sought you out, Mark, at Mildred's Lane in Beach Lake, Pennsylvania, on the Delaware River.¹ I was visiting an old eel fisherman on the Delaware River in Hancock, New York, as research for a book I was working on about freshwater eels. So I guess we could say that eels are a thread that helped bring us together as friends. I have returned every summer since to engage in the beautiful and strange amalgam of art, inquiry, and living, that is your summer experiment (along with Morgan Puett). (Fig. 4) Something about the place encouraged creativity and discussion without needing to define what discipline the productions were a part of. This *undisciplined* nature is what continues to attract me to the place. Why, for instance, could fly-fishing or fly-tying not be considered an art, or carpentry, or digging a hole in the ground, or setting a table for dinner? The Yankee spirit is about rugged individualism, self-



reliance, and a trespassing of rules in the spirit of survival, and I feel that Mildred's Lane and your work embodies that spirit (and I'd like to think that mine does too).

There are many things in your work that I see as having grown out of a kind of New England ethos. You make use of what is available to you (as a frugal, resourceful Yankee)—what you dig up from the ground, find on the beach, or among objects people cast off. (Fig. 5) I felt your approach to be refreshing and liberating—that you could arrange these found objects in such a way that they manifest your intellectual investigations.

It's hard to know where to stop when trying to describe the effect that New England has had on me and on my work. How do you feel the New England landscape has shaped you and your own life and practice?

FIG. 4 James Prosek leading a taxidermy workshop in July 2017 at Mildred's Lane, a collaborative site for artists founded by Mark Dion and J. Morgan Puett. Courtesy of James Prosek

FIG. 5 Debris collected by Mark Dion in New Bedford in February 2019, for *New England Cabinet of Marine Debris* (Lyme Art Colony). Courtesy of the artist

¹ Mildred's Lane is a "rustic, 96-acre site deep in the woods of rural northeastern Pennsylvania.... It is an ongoing collaboration between J. Morgan Puett, Mark Dion, their son Grey Rabbit Puett, and their friends and colleagues. It is a home and an experiment in living." Its "working-living-researching environment has been developed to foster engagement

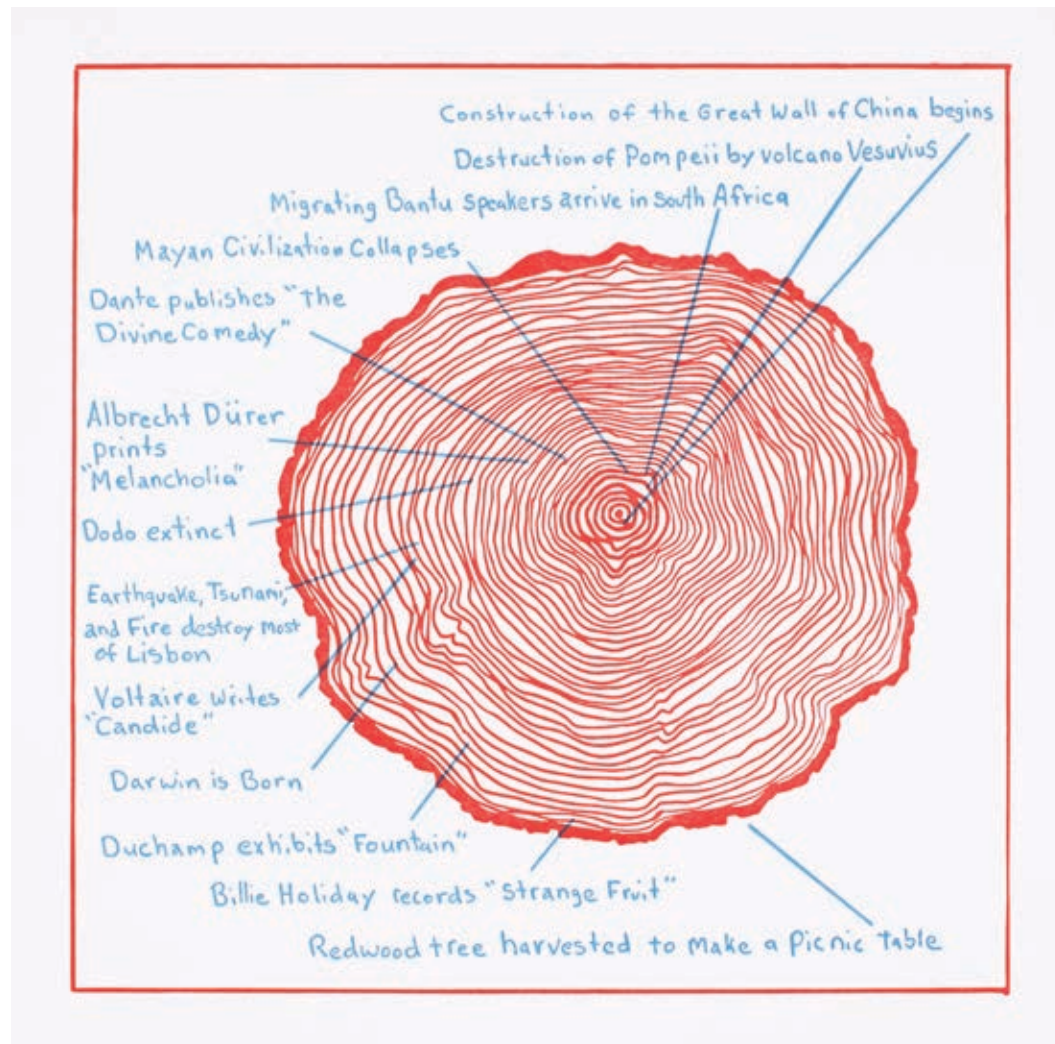
with every aspect of life." www.mildredslane.com/introduction (Accessed April 2019).

DION We share this passion for nature and ideas about nature articulated in print. My parents were serious blue-collar types. My mother worked in textile mills from the day of her sixteenth birthday until I was born. She then worked the counter of a greasy spoon diner while my brother and I were kids, and returned to the mills as soon as my brother hit high school. My father was a military man until he retired and spent most of the rest of his life unloading trucks for a now defunct store chain (Mars Bargain Land). Certainly, my mother never read a book and my father claimed to read while in the military, but did not read during my lifetime. So, our house was devoid of books except for *The Golden Guide to the Seashore*, and later *The Golden Encyclopedia*. The importance of the *Seashore Guide* in my life cannot be underestimated. I scoured that little book until the binding split, and it was held together with yellowing Scotch tape. At the time we lived just down the road from the rocky shore and this slim volume was my Rosetta Stone to the tide pools, marshes, lagoon, and coast.

New England for me was like the world in miniature. My suburban home was bordered by an orchard and an overgrown field. Down the street was a small forest, and a bike ride away was the beach. We also explored the toxic industrial waterfront, abandoned factory buildings and farm houses, garbage dumps, ship graveyard, wetlands, and cemeteries. The sandy beaches with bathers and sun seekers were a total bore, however the wetlands, sand dunes, farms, and gritty industrial sites were equidistant playgrounds. With BB guns slung over our shoulders we accessed the diverse landscapes by banana-seat bicycles. We encountered nature here, not in a pristine form of wilderness but as something resilient, hard edged. For me the concept of nature has never been something pure, outside the hand of human influence. Rather it was a force and process in constant dialectic with the waxing and waning of civilization. Nature was there during my New England childhood despite all we had done to suppress it. When we wanted to see birds, we headed to the dump, not the wildlife sanctuary.

Of course, the marine industries really impacted my view of nature. New Bedford is steeped in the story of Yankee whaling. By the time I was coming of age, this bygone heroic narrative was a hard sell, as issues of conservation and wildlife protection were salient. I was shaped by a hands-on conservation ethic promoted by Greenpeace and TV programs like *Wild Kingdom* and *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*. I even heard Cousteau grimly lecture at the New Bedford Whaling Museum. The contradictions and conflicts between the promoters of the commercial fishing industry and the scientific resource managers filled the local newspaper and dominated coffee shop discourse.

More than any other factor, the changes and development of my home region forged my practice as an artist engaged in wildlife conservation and the culture



of nature. The farms, orchards, fields, and forests I frequented as a kid all became shopping centers or housing developments. (Fig. 6) As teens we would pull up survey spikes, flatten truck tires and rip down construction lines, but all to no avail. The bulldozers took it all. It breaks my heart to go back to these sites to find abandoned K-Marts and car dealerships where craggy weathered oaks, frog-rich ponds, and rocky outcrops once dominated.

PROSEK It sounds like the circumstances of our upbringings encouraged us to think about nature as something humans interact with, not just something to look at. (Fig. 7) And growing up in Southern New England, near towns built on commercial fishing (New Bedford), and on manufacturing (Bridgeport), we admired a nature that continued on in spite of the best efforts of humans to fragment it and pave over it. The title of this show is *Fragile Earth*, and yet the nature we know and have witnessed

FIG. 6
 Mark Dion, "Death of a Giant," in *World in a Box*, 2015. One from a set of 27 prints housed in a custom-made oak wood storage box. Letterpress, 8½ x 8½ in. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles



continues to surprise us with its resilience and tenacity. (Fig. 8) To survive you sometimes have to be an opportunist—like the seabirds you went to see foraging at the dump.

In my youth, obsessed with the beauty of trout and with fishing for trout with artificial flies, I heard people talk of trout as being fragile, as living in cold water resources that were in constant danger of disappearing—in the face of deforestation, development, and the cumulative effects of human encroachment on their habitats. And this was all true. At the same time these fish had survived multiple and major climatic changes. Almost their entire native range was covered in ice during the last glaciation, in some places a mile deep. The fish in rivers and streams retreated to the oceans or to small refuges where the ice did not form. Can we call these diminutive and jewel-like fish fragile? In my county, the few native brook trout streams often flowed behind strip malls, through housing developments, by churches and cemeteries. Somehow these fish managed to maintain healthy populations.

Was nature, or is nature, a wilderness devoid of humans? Not in my mind, and not in yours either, as you say. When was nature in North America in its purest state? Before European colonization? Before man crossed the Bering land bridge from what is now Russia to Alaska over 20,000 years ago? Some academics (notably the environmental historian William Cronon) have written that wilderness is a misleading and even dangerous idea. It suggests a fictional nature with which humans never interacted.

What is the "right" nature? What should be the goals of conservation? I'm not sure there is one answer, and my own thoughts and beliefs in the face of these questions change every day. I think we get stuck in words, and expect too much from them. I like the term "wilderness." I never held it as a place where there are no humans. I *do* think of wilderness, however, as a place where *fewer* humans go—and I think that such places feel different from the places where humans frequent.

What is the role of naturalist art today, when the questions seem to become more numerous and nuanced and more difficult to answer? What can art provide in this time when our earth is indeed looking vulnerable to rapid and regrettable change induced by human influence?

DION Your question answers itself in a sense—the job of the artist-naturalist is precisely to interrogate the question of nature at the moment when it is subject



FIG. 7
 Mark Dion photographed by James Prosek on a fishing trip in Massachusetts, 2011. Courtesy of James Prosek

FIG. 8
 James Prosek, *Burned Log with Clay Flowers*, 2016. Bronze, clay, oil paint, 9½ x 21 x 9 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York

to rapid change and its very definition is evolving in unprecedented ways. There is, of course, a place still for traditional representations of nature that highlight beautiful, remarkable, and unseen life in photography, film, drawing, and painting media. (Fig. 9) To me these expressions do the important work of celebrating diversity and building wonder and empathy, which help motivate connection and concern for wild places and wild things. However, I think equally important are the representations of nature under duress, which help us to understand the long-term consequences of our poor stewardship of the planet. (Fig. 10) I was very impressed by the last season of *Blue Planet*, which started out with virtuosic segments of ocean life across the globe, but ended with episodes discussing the impact of ocean plastics.² For many viewers this was powerful and motivating and allowed them to make connections to their own behavior. When I saw these episodes, I was immediately transported to thoughts of my dear friend, the amazing artist Pamela Longobardi, and her complex work on ocean plastics which echo many of these themes. She has concentrated for decades on issues of marine debris and has enabled viewers to better understand the



10

relationship between their lifestyle and its impact in remote but environmentally significant places and organisms.

I am interested in how artists like yourself and Alexis Rockman, Rachel Berwick, and Walton Ford bridge the contemporary practice of the artist-naturalist with the tradition which includes Elliot Porter, Audubon, Maria Sibylla Merian, and scores of others all the way back to the depictions of animals on cave walls. In many ways our practice is much more about the history of science than science itself today.

I think of my work as an artistic equivalent to the academic

field of the history of science, rather than a discourse around contemporary issues of conservation biology and ecology. My investigation is much more into trying to understand how our suicidal attitude toward the natural world evolved within the history of ideas—I am interested in dissecting the history of the culture of nature and the role art plays in that narrative. For a new generation of naturalists, we need artists



9

FIG. 9
Mark Dion and James Prosek installing Prosek's work in *Oceanomania: Souvenirs of Mysterious Seas*, at the Musée Océanographique de Monaco and Nouveau Musée National de Monaco / Villa Paloma, Monte Carlo, 2011. Courtesy of James Prosek

FIG. 10
Mark Dion installing *New England Cabinet of Marine Debris (Lyme Art Colony)* at the Florence Griswold Museum, May 2019

² *The Blue Planet* is a British television nature documentary series created and produced by the BBC that premiered in 2001. A second season, *Blue Planet II* debuted in 2017. Both were narrated by naturalist Sir David Attenborough.

looking backward at the history of ideas and attitudes, as well as those rooted in the present extinction catastrophe and those looking and thinking about the future and developing possible solutions. All three approaches are essential. At this historic ecological crossroad there is significant work for artist-naturalists to do, and it is on many fronts and in all possible media. I also think there is room for a diversity of expression and approach, from traditional wildlife art to contemporary social practice and activist art. It is a mistake for artists to spend time building walls and hierarchies around which approach is most efficient and successful. We have too many real enemies to waste time battling each other.

PROSEK I think it has been natural for us to reflect on the history of ideas about nature as well as our present condition. We both did it without even thinking about it. In our childhoods, you and I loved the field guide. My earliest drawings were made not directly from nature but from nature in books, already processed by other minds, by other writers and artists. I'm not sure if I would have fallen in love with nature if I didn't have access to these books where nature had already been framed by the confines of a page. I also would not have fallen in love with nature had I not been set loose in the suburban landscape where the stuff I saw in books could be seen in life. Only later did I begin to understand, or at least deeply enjoy, nature on its own terms outside of books. Which makes me wonder, did I need art, or artifice, or representations of nature in order to fall in love with nature itself at all? Only a bit later did I start to draw directly from nature. Specifically I remember—perhaps because a photo exists of me holding it—drawing a magnolia warbler that had flown into the window of our living room and died. (Fig. 11)

Nature in the museum as with nature in books, or in cabinets of curiosities is all processed nature—nature broken into units and made digestible by humans for

humans. It is through interpretations of nature that many of us come to know it, and these interpretations are beautiful in their range and diversity. But is something lost when nature is read through one system, one language or interpretation, or by one taxonomy—as Linnaeus's for instance? First one has to acknowledge the beauty of these methods. A lot is gained—for one thing, a way of communicating—by learning it through the lens of a structure that we impose on nature, like language. Our “way in” to nature is largely through these systems.

But I think at a certain moment in our childhoods, if I'm not mistaken, you and I both rebelled against the necessary but reductive comfort of the field guide. We realized that the world did not come with words on it, that we put them there. When we noticed for ourselves that nature could not be contained by boxes, that it wasn't as simple as



11

FIG. 11
Young James Prosek with a magnolia warbler. Courtesy of the artist

a picture of an animal and a name next to it, we felt compelled to trespass across the boundaries that names create.

Your work is in part about critiquing the history of how humans have tried to bring order to nature. But at the same time in our work we are creating new orders, new arrangements, new taxonomies in a sense, based on personal experience and prejudices. Painting and installation are both ways of creating order and permanence in a constantly changing world. Is it just about working to keep the dialogue alive? Is part of the artist's role to shake up accepted ways of seeing, to allow fresh perspectives to exist? Do you think our love of order is in part responsible for the "suicidal attitude" you allude to?

DION All societies construct taxonomies, even if they are remarkably basic, like things that fly, things that swim, things that crawl on land. Not all of these societies destroy the world around them with such ferocious efficiency. (Fig. 12) Western scholarly taxonomies are scientific and strive to be natural rather than artificial. Our biologist friends are attempting to find a system of order which actually maps evolutionary relationships. It is perhaps ironic that the societies that construct the most subtle and elaborate orders are also the ones which, through a double whammy of colonialism and capitalism, have been the most overwhelmingly destructive.

If we look at what Linnaeus says in the first edition of *Systema naturae* (1735), "The first step in wisdom is to know the things themselves." He goes on, "This notion consists in having a true idea of the object; objects are distinguished and known by classifying them methodically and giving them appropriate names. Therefore, classification and name-giving will be the foundation of our science." So, I guess your question is, is classification also the foundation of domination and destruction? I think it is rather a tool, which can be employed as part of a program of plunder and degradation but can, and very often is, a tool for protection and fostering of biodiversity. Undoubtedly in the search for order in nature there has been an aspect of the pernicious search for hierarchies, natural theological nonsense and all types of mischief, but it has also been a tool in understanding evolution, wildlife conservation, and debunking pseudo sciences like eugenics. In all the time I was looking at various hierarchical systems of order, what became clear is that those who make the order are those seated firmly atop it. There is no top, or direction for systematists today.

As artists we can explore the impulse to order in ways that are also skeptical. We can and do use humor to undercut the authoritative assumptions of those who would organize people, living things, places, and even objects. I don't think

the inclination to organize life, things or ideas is inherently maleficent, but when the desire to categorize is coupled with ideologies of supremacy, colonialism, unhindered resource extraction, capitalism, and fanaticism then we have a formula for catastrophe.

12



FIG. 12
Mark Dion, *300 Million Years of Flight*, 2012. Screen print on paper, 32 x 26 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles

Clay, Coral, and Climate Change: Sculpting Hope for the Ocean

Courtney Mattison and Jane Lubchenco

1

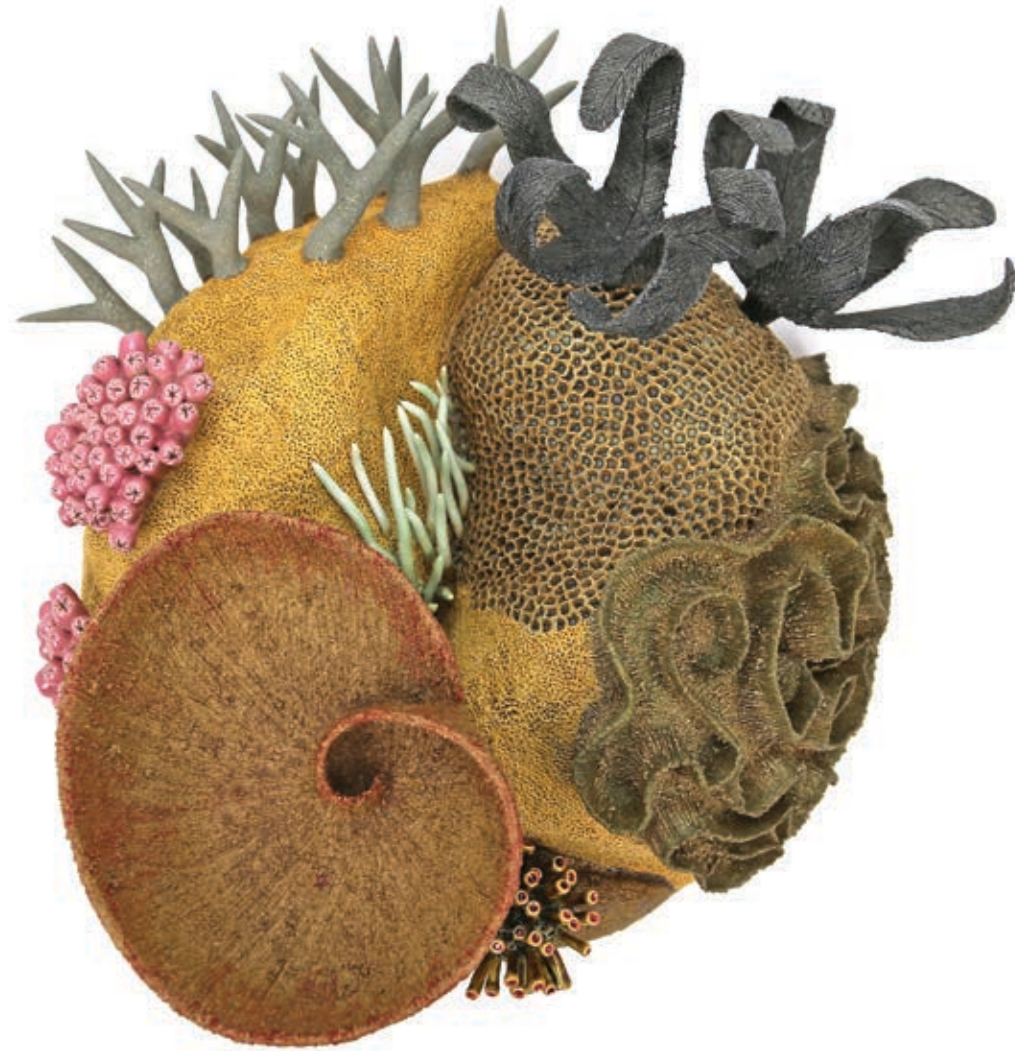


FIG. 1
Courtney Mattison, *Coral Triangle II*, 2015. Glazed stoneware and porcelain,
19 x 17 x 9 in. Courtesy of the artist

COURTNEY MATTISON When we were first introduced almost a decade ago, you were U.S. Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and an inaugural member of President Obama’s Science “Dream Team.” I was a master’s candidate in environmental studies at Brown University, exploring the intersections of marine science, conservation policy, and art under your former Ph.D. student and my thesis advisor, Professor Heather Leslie.

In the years before we met, I had fallen head over heels in love with coral reefs. The exotic forms and often-venomous appendages of the creatures inhabiting reefs of the Indo-Pacific captivated my imagination as I earned my scuba certification



in 2004 and conducted field research on the Great Barrier Reef as a college student in 2007. (Fig. 2) I experienced a sense of wonder and curiosity unlike any I had before and felt inspired to sculpt the organisms I was studying out of clay. (Fig. 3)

Yet at the same time that I was falling in love with coral reefs and memorizing their intricate growth patterns by sculpting them, it saddened me to realize how quickly they were being destroyed. In my marine biology classes, I learned how climate change is causing corals to sicken and bleach, and ocean acidification is slowing and eroding their skeletal growth. I learned about harmful fishing practices and pollution runoff disturbing the delicate balance of reef ecosystems. Within my lifetime, human activities like fossil fuel use, overfishing, and pollution could wipe out coral reefs.

Your faith in the power of science communication to shape public perception and policy set a pivotal example for me as I worked to determine how I could uniquely contribute to saving the coral reefs I had grown to love. As a leader in ocean conservation science and policy, you have been a role model for me and so many others who are passionate about protecting our blue planet. I am forever grateful for your confidence in my art practice to inspire coral reef conservation, and I admire your enthusiasm for finding creative and multifaceted solutions to environmental issues.



FIG. 2
Courtney Mattison scuba diving in Australia, 2007. Courtesy of the artist

FIG. 3
Mattison building *Confluence (Our Changing Seas V)* on her studio floor, 2018. Courtesy of the artist

THE HONORABLE JANE LUBCHENCO, PH.D. Courtney, it was such a treat to meet you in 2011 at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) conference. I knew you were my 'academic granddaughter' since you had studied with Heather. But when I met you, I was delighted to see your mastery of coral reef biology



and ecology and your deep passion for sharing your phenomenal art to educate and inspire others. We bonded immediately over our shared love of the mystery and majesty of ocean life. I was pleased we could work together the next year to display your stunning art in the entrance lobby of the Department of Commerce building, nestled between the White House and the Mall in Washington, D.C. (Fig. 4) Many folks told me that seeing your work stopped them in their tracks, beckoned them to come closer, evoked awe

at the beauty of corals and horror at their threats, and inspired a keen desire to take action—exactly what we had hoped it would do. I thought of Baba Dioum's words "In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught."¹ You are a gifted teacher-artist!

Like you, I fell in love with the ocean at a pivotal moment, and have since devoted most of my career to understanding it better and figuring out ways we can achieve the dual goals of a healthy ocean and thriving people, communities, and economies. (Fig. 5) Growing up in land-locked Colorado, I was drawn to the outdoors, but my conversion to nature's salty and wet side began in earnest during college when I took a summer class in marine biology in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Until then, I had no inkling of the incredible diversity of life in the ocean. I learned that 34 of the 36 major groups of organisms (excluding microbes) are found in the ocean whereas only 12 live on land. The more I learned, the more fascinated I became. Cool invertebrates like sea stars, octopus, jellyfish, giant clams, sponges, and their many relatives became my passion.

Over the years, I've seen the ocean change in dramatic ways. Today it is depleted and disrupted due to overfishing. It is polluted by too many nutrients, toxins, and plastic, and because of climate change and ocean acidification, it is significantly warmer, more acidic, and it holds less oxygen. These changes spell big trouble for people because we depend upon the ocean for so many things, including food and the oxygen we breathe, but also for the joy, inspiration, and renewal we derive from the amazing life in the ocean.² The changes underway threaten us, and they pose grave risks for most of life in the ocean.



FIG. 4 Jane Lubchenco and Courtney Mattison at the Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C., 2011 with *Our Changing Seas I*. Courtesy of Derek Parks for NOAA

FIG. 5 Lubchenco conducting field work in Washington, 1983. Courtesy of Joel W. Rogers

1 The Senegalese forestry engineer Baba Dioum included these oft-quoted words in a paper presented at the 1968 meeting of the General Assembly of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

2 Just like plants on land, the plants of the ocean (big ones like kelp, but especially tiny ones in the plankton) produce oxygen as a byproduct of photosynthesis. In fact, half of the oxygen on the planet comes from the ocean. And almost all of that comes from the tiny *Prochlorococcus*, a species that was not even discovered until 1986 by the MIT scientist Sally Chisholm and her colleagues. Earlier scientists

MATTISON In graduate school I was surprised to learn the extent to which publicly perceived baselines of healthy ecosystems have shifted. So many people don't realize how much more vibrant and functional parts of the natural environment used to be compared to today. Without a record built from data and, in some cases, artistic historical depictions, it is impossible for people to be aware of how quickly and dramatically things have changed.

In the 15 years that I've spent exploring the ocean doing fieldwork and scuba diving, I've already seen big shifts. As global warming worsens, those changes are accelerating. The northern part of the Great Barrier Reef still looked relatively healthy back in 2007 when I was studying there, but in 2016 when I returned to the same reefs, it was like a ghost town. So many corals had bleached and died and the sharks and other fish had disappeared.

LUBCHENCO You are right! The ocean water is warming at an alarming rate, and the resulting stress affects not only corals, but the entire reef ecosystem, thus compromising the benefits it provides to us. Corals are like the trees in a rainforest—they provide the habitat for most of the other species living there—from tiny plankton-eating pygmy seahorses to colorful herbivorous parrotfishes to impressive predators like tiger sharks and even ocean giants like the plankton-eating whale sharks or manta rays. Bleached reefs quickly become a wasteland and the beauty and the bounty disappear. (Fig. 6)

Climate change affects other ocean ecosystems too, threatening the many benefits we derive from them—healthy and delicious seafood, jobs, livelihoods, and protection from storm surge. Coastal ecosystems like coral reefs, mangroves, wetlands, kelp forests, and oyster reefs absorb and dampen the energy of storms and storm surge and thus protect the people, homes, fields, and businesses landward of those features. The rate at which ocean ecosystems are changing has caught many people by surprise, including scientists. It sometimes seems like we are rediscovering a lesson Joni Mitchell noted nearly 50 years ago: "You don't know what you've got 'till it's gone." One of your messages is that we can and should save reefs before it's too late. I agree. And that starts with learning more about them.

MATTISON It's true; awareness is key. Many people don't even realize that corals are animals; they don't have faces, and their colonial forms are more similar to the growth patterns of plants. It fascinates me to think about how these tiny faceless animals communicate with one another and compete for survival. In coral reefs as in



FIG. 6 Coral bleaching at Heron Island, Great Barrier Reef. Courtesy The Ocean Agency / XL Catlin Seaview Survey

missed seeing *Prochlorococcus* because it is so tiny. It is part of what scientists call the 'picoplankton,' which range in size from 2µm to 0.2µm. (A µm, pronounced micrometer, is one millionth of a meter). Imagine! We cannot even see the most abundant photosynthetic organism on Earth, yet we depend upon it to produce much of the oxygen we breathe!

big cities, each individual plays a role that can affect how the ecosystem functions. The key to success is finding harmony in heterogeneity. There are so many lessons we can learn from a coral reef; life is simultaneously exuberant and fragile. A healthy coral reef is full of food, mates, competition, hiding spots, and hunting grounds. These survival priorities cause corals to grow in intricate and unusual forms, stretching and branching out to reach a prime spot in the water column. Reef-building corals are sculptors in their own right, precipitating calcium carbonate skeletons that grow atop one another and transform the seafloor into something like a city. The *architecture* they construct is far more creative and complex than any conceived by humans. We have a lot to learn from coral reefs—assuming we can lessen our environmental impacts and give them room to survive.

LUBCHENCO One of your gifts is to help viewers see this architecture and begin to glimpse coral reef's glorious diversity of shapes, colors, and textures. This biological diversity is at risk because of the multiple threats to the ocean. I admire the way you communicate these risks with a dual message of urgency and hope. I share a sense of both, and time is running out. But my hope comes from changes I've seen. More people are paying attention—young people, businesses, mothers, faith groups, communities, and states—and they are taking action, for example on climate change. I've seen people rise to other big ocean challenges such as reforming fisheries or restoring coral reefs that interact with climate change. (Fig. 7) To date, the inspiring success stories are too few, but they do provide models and inspiration. If enough of us were galvanized and if we embraced smarter ways of producing energy, catching and growing seafood, restoring reefs and other degraded habitats, and protecting natural places, we could make a quantum leap forward toward a planet in balance. To be sure, saving reefs will be hard. It will require global actions to reduce carbon pollution, reform fisheries, and create large fully-protected areas safeguarded from extraction. Scientists can provide guidance, but real action will not happen until we have the public demand and political will to be smarter about our actions. The world is beginning to rally around the importance of reining in carbon emissions and switching to renewable sources of energy. Your work provides much-needed motivation for action.

MATTISON I admire your ability to contextualize these issues in the big picture and highlight how we all play a role in enabling a healthy ocean. For many people around the world, even those directly dependent on coral reefs for their main source of protein, the ocean seems too vast and too foreign to require our help. Few people are lucky or brave enough to explore under the ocean's surface and



FIG. 7
Lubchenco conducting coral restoration for NOAA in Florida, 2010.
Courtesy Tom Moore for NOAA

experience the beauty and value of life below the waves. The concept of climate change in particular is nebulous to so many, partly because it is difficult to visualize. You can't easily observe carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases floating into the air, or see the way they create a sort of thermal blanket around our planet that keeps heat produced by the sun from leaving our atmosphere. By this point, it is widely accepted (and *scientifically proven*) that climate change is caused by burning fossil fuels like coal and oil to create energy and implementing disruptive land use practices like slash-and-burn deforestation.³ We know Earth is already exhibiting negative effects from this human-induced phenomenon, including warming sea temperatures, melting ice caps and glaciers, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events. These in turn are threatening key habitats and vulnerable species as well as local and global economies, food and water security, and safe living conditions. Yet to many of us, these changes are largely invisible. If we can't see what is being lost—the glaciers melting into the sea, the species starving and losing habitat, the coral reefs bleaching and dying—or understand how those changes affect our personal wellbeing, how are we supposed to care enough to choose to change our daily activities to prioritize the conservation of ecosystems we understand so little about?

The Baba Dioum quote you referenced is so accurate; we protect what we care about, and we care about what we know and understand. I believe art has a unique power to influence how we understand our lives and our planet, and it can make us connect on a personal level to concepts or environments that we would otherwise ignore. Art can bring the plight of coral reefs, for example, above the surface and into view, making us appreciate their fragile beauty and empathize with the threats they face in ways that drive us to change our behavior.

LUBCHENCO I agree! It is also difficult for many people to see how they connect to the ocean. Not only do they benefit from healthy seafood, oxygen, and more, but they contribute directly to either the degradation or restoration of the ocean. For example, just outside the window of your exhibition at the Florence Griswold Museum, the Lieutenant River joins the Connecticut River and meets the ocean at Long Island Sound, just four miles away. What people put into the river and the air right there goes directly into the sea. So, too, is every state connected to the ocean. To paraphrase Senator Richard Lugar, "Every state is an ocean state. We all benefit from and affect the health of the ocean." Unless disposed of properly, the chemicals, fertilizers, and plastics that we throw away end up in the ocean. Fortunately, there are many things that individuals can do to prevent degradation and return the ocean to a healthy state. And for those interested, there are many excellent organizations that have great suggestions about how to help. But I'm curious, how do *you* tackle concepts like climate change or ocean acidification that are hard to visualize?

³ "Observed Changes," in *Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report Fifth Assessment Report*, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, https://ar5-syr.ipcc.ch/topic_observedchanges.php.

MATTISON I think art can affect us emotionally in a way that scientific data do not. When non-scientists look at a graph showing rates of global warming over a period of time, that information may mean less on a personal level than seeing a work of art or other form of creative representation that translates those data in a vivid, aesthetically powerful way. Art can help us see the world differently and can guide us to connect in unexpected ways to the natural environment that we rely on for life, and that we impact every day. Art possesses an enormous power to inspire people to change their lifestyle choices and become more aware of how they're connected to everything else.

My work included in the *Fragile Earth* exhibition explores a number of different ecological shifts that are occurring in coral reefs today. Coral bleaching—a stress



FIG. 8
Courtney Mattison, *Afterglow (Our Changing Seas VI)* (details), 2018.
Glazed stoneware and porcelain, Courtesy of the artist

response triggered by rising sea temperatures related to global warming—is a central theme in both *Afterglow (Our Changing Seas VI)* and *Malum Geminos*. *Afterglow* depicts the transition that coral reefs are making from healthy and diverse to sickened and bleached, with sterile white clusters of bleached corals swirling around a colorful central core as if swept up in the winds of a cyclone. (Fig. 8, Pls. [Afterglow]) The title *Malum Geminos*, meaning “evil twins” in Latin, is an homage to your 2009 statement at the U.N. climate talks in Copenhagen, Denmark referring to ocean acidification as the “equally evil twin” of climate change caused by carbon dioxide emissions dissolving into the sea.⁴ (Pls. [Malum Geminos]) The fractal pattern design of bleached corals branches horizontally in a bookmatched pattern across the gallery wall, with clusters of gelatinous white polyps that appear to have had their supportive skeletons dissolved by acidic seawater. The skeletal nature of the design also references your other comparison of ocean acidification as osteoporosis of the sea.



LUBCHENCO I wish I could have had your artwork to show to members of Congress when I was invited in 2009 to explain the “equally evil twins” of climate change and ocean acidification! They had heard of climate change, but ocean acidification was a new idea. I explained that both problems were caused by excess amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Then, instead of simply talking about ocean acidification, I demonstrated a few key principles by performing simple chemistry experiments in front of them. (Fig. 9) I illustrated the ideas that (1) water absorbs carbon dioxide and (2) in doing so, it becomes more acidic, and (3) I showed that objects made of

calcium carbonate (chalk) dissolve faster in more acidic water. I included images of partially dissolved and eroded corals and shells of lobsters, mussels, and oysters—all demonstrating the “osteoporosis of the sea” idea. These arresting images plus the color-changing, bubbling water in vials and beakers certainly got their attention, but your art would have provided a complementary and very different way to communicate the seriousness and consequences of carbon pollution.

MATTISON I can see why your demonstration caught their attention! It’s fun to experiment with creative and unexpected ways to visualize these issues. Another shift that my work explores is the homogenization of species, as climate change and other forms of anthropogenic habitat destruction cause more resilient species to take over and become invasive. In *Texture Study I*, one type of tube sponge

4 “I call this ocean acidification climate change’s equally evil twin, if you will ... As the oceans become more acidic, it’s harder for corals, oysters, clams, crabs, mussels, lobsters to make their shells or their hard parts, and they dissolve faster. So, ocean acidification, which is a relatively unappreciated problem, is as important as climate change. It’s one that most people haven’t heard of. Another

way to think of ocean acidification is as osteoporosis of the seas.” Quoted from “Acidic oceans: The ‘evil twin’ of warming,” *Associated Press*, December 22, 2009, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/34491541/ns/us_news-environment/t/acidic-oceans-evil-twin-warming/.

FIG. 9
Lubchenco demonstrating ocean acidification for members of United States Congress, 2009. Courtesy of NOAA

swirls outward and fills a geometric space. (Fig. 10, Pls. [Texture Study]) While tube sponges aren't necessarily expected to become invasive in reality, my *Texture Study* series experiments with monochromatic vignettes of what the seafloor might look like in a post-mass-extinction future.

Although I am exploring a number of doom and gloom topics in this collection of work, I also hope viewers will realize that there is still hope for us to fight climate change and our other impacts on the ocean. My *Hope Spots* series—inspired by Dr. Sylvia Earle's concept of protecting Earth's most vital marine ecosystems to restore the heart of the ocean—celebrates the beauty and value of places that need our protection now more than ever. (Fig. 1, Pls. [Hope Spots]) Both policymakers and the public have so much power to turn things around. Do you notice a meaningful change in public or political attitudes towards climate change and other threats to the ocean?

LUBCHENCO Yes! There have been palpable shifts in public awareness and meaningful action. (Fig. 11) For example, one of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals adopted by The United Nations as the highest priorities for action through 2030 focuses on the ocean. Changes are not yet at the scale we need to save reefs and help ensure a vibrant future, but the progress is tangible and encouraging.

One area where we have seen big changes has been the creation of fully protected areas in the ocean where no extractive or destructive activities are allowed. For most of humanity's history on Earth, the ocean was a *de facto* Marine Protected Area because most of it was too remote, too deep, or too rocky to access reliably. That changed dramatically in the middle of the last century when modern technology made it possible to fish, mine, and drill almost everywhere. A decade ago, 0.3% of the ocean was partially protected and only 0.01% was fully protected. Scientists found that large, fully-protected areas are very effective in providing safe havens for wildlife, enhancing fisheries, and providing insurance against uncertainty and environmental change. These results provided a strong impetus to create additional protected areas. Today, due to intense efforts by citizens and government leaders, 5% of the global ocean is now protected, with a little over 2% highly protected.⁵ This increase of more than an order of magnitude in just one decade is impressive headway. For comparison, 15% of the land is protected.

The U.S. has been a leader in protecting the waters under its jurisdiction. Thanks to actions by citizens and Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, 23% of U.S. waters is highly protected. One of those protected places is only about 130 miles southeast of Cape Cod—the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. In that special place, geology, ocean currents and biology combine to



FIG. 11
Lubchenco just prior to addressing members of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City, to recommend establishment of a Sustainable Development Goal for the ocean, 2014. Courtesy of Jane Lubchenco

⁵ Each coastal nation has jurisdiction over the natural resources found in what is called its 'Exclusive Economic Zone' (EEZ). Almost all of the protected areas lie within the EEZs of various nations. The U.S. has the largest EEZ in the world, over 1.6 million kilometers square, an area one and a half times the continental U.S. minus Alaska. Forty-two percent of the

surface area of the ocean is in EEZs. The remaining 58% is in international waters that are often called the high seas.

create a diverse and vibrant ecosystem, teeming with over 54 species of deep-sea corals, sponges, and anemones on the seafloor and tunas, billfish, sharks, sea turtles, sperm whales, and seabirds above. It is a magnificent, unique place.

So, progress is possible! Moreover, we are now discovering that fully protected areas can also enhance the resilience of ocean ecosystems to climate change. Nations of the world have committed to protect 10% of the ocean by 2020, and are considering protecting as much as 30% by 2030. That will not happen unless citizens and businesses want it to. Reining in greenhouse gas emissions *and* creating large, fully-protected marine areas would be a powerful combination—and just what corals need. Citizens can help by talking about these issues, reducing their own carbon, water, and plastic footprints, telling their elected officials how they feel, and working with other citizens to make change happen. We've seen a remarkable ability of corals to recover if we act in time, and the time is now!



MATTISON Time *is* precious. When a reef is destroyed by a cyclone or coral bleaching event, regeneration is possible, over time. Fragments of broken corals and larval baby corals can grow on bare patches of rubble and rebuild a reef. Fish populations can replenish themselves if given enough room to grow through marine protected areas and other fishing regulations. The ocean can cleanse itself of plastic and other pollutants if we stop depositing them there in the first place. Just as our bodies can recover from injuries with proper care, the ocean can heal itself—if we let it.

LUBCHENCO Amen!

FIG. 10
Courtney Mattison, *Texture Study I* (detail), 2019. Glazed stoneware

Thanks to Oregon State University Ph.D. candidate Emily Boring for contributing valuable ideas and insights to this dialogue.



Those readers who have enjoyed Arthur Hemings's memoir, *Miss Florence and the Artists of Old Lyme*, an account of his time spent at the Lyme Art Colony in its heyday, will be delighted to learn that a previously unpublished chapter has come to light.¹ Heming began writing his manuscript in 1937, and completed it shortly before his death in 1940. It is unclear whether the chapter was removed by Heming himself, or was the decision of the publisher who may have felt it to be a little too "bohemian" for the time. There has also been suggestion that it may be the work of another of the colony's artists attempting to pose as Heming. The text contains quotes from his book *The Drama of the Forests, Romance and Adventure* published in 1921, but otherwise is stylistically somewhat different than other chapters of the memoir.² Despite its mysterious provenance, the writing provides new insight into life at the Lyme Art Colony and for that reason is printed in its entirety here.

¹ Arthur Heming, *Miss Florence and the Artists of Old Lyme* (Old Lyme, CT: Lyme Historical Society-Florence Griswold Association, Inc., 1971).

² Arthur Heming, *The Drama of the Forests, Romance and Adventure* (Garden City, NY and Toronto: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1921).

Silver Wings and Golden Scales

or

AN EVENING OF METAMORPHOSIS
AT THE LYME ART COLONY



Jennifer Angus

FIG. 1
From E. van Bruyssel, *The Population of An Old Pear-Tree; or, Stories of Insect Life*. New York: Macmillan and Co., 1870.

We were drawn to Miss Florence's boardinghouse in Old Lyme, Connecticut, first by its proximity to the scenic countryside of pastoral and coastal views, and later by the fine company to be found there. (Fig. 2) As artists we wanted to capture the very essence of nature in all its wonder. While high drama is to be



found in the theater, the greatest stage is to be discovered in nature. Here are enacted stories of birth, life, and death in a place of terrible beauty and sometimes stunning cruelty. For those of an artistic temperament, inspiration is to be found in the dark and light of nature. For myself, *it was in childhood that the first primitive spirit came whispering to me.*³

Since boyhood *I was for ever* [sic] *wondering what is daily going on in the ... forest? ... not just this week, this month or this season, but what is actually occurring day by day, throughout the cycle of an entire*

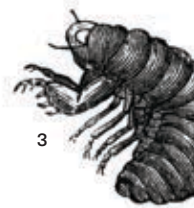
*year.*⁴ It was that thought which fascinated me at such a young age, so it is no surprise that I should be filled with questions, wonder, and astonishment at an event which occurred while in residence at Miss Florence's that I understand to happen once in seventeen years ... the emergence of the Magic Cicadas! (Fig. 3)

Now I take some liberty, for in fact these cicadas are rightly known as *Magicalada*, a genus of periodical cicadas native to Eastern North America. To those with a reverence for nature, what we experienced that summer was indeed magical. For a month we were serenaded by the cicadas' chorus of golden scales.

Numbering in the millions it was a symphony of sound, a constant cheery hum, or perhaps a cacophonous screech depending upon one's perspective. (Fig. 4)

We glimpsed silver wings catching the sunlight as the creatures took to the air, and then suddenly disappear within the trees.

It is difficult to truly convey the magnificence of this experience because it was quite frankly otherworldly. I confess that as I observed cicada



nymphs in the thousands emerge from below ground after their seventeen long years of confinement, a chill ran down my spine. (Fig. 5) The sheer number was overwhelming, and they moved like infantry soldiers as they marched *en masse* towards the trees.



FIG. 2 Artists on the porch of the Griswold House, ca. 1905. Lyme Historical Society Archives, Photographs: Lyme Art Colony, Box 1, 70018.150, Florence Griswold Museum

FIG. 3 Magic Cicadas from Louis Figuier, *The Insect World: Being A Popular Account of the Orders of Insects; together with A Description of the Habits and Economy of Some of the Most Interesting Species*. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1872.

3 Heming, *The Drama of the Forests, Romance and Adventure*, xi.

4 Ibid.

FIG. 4 From Acheta Domestica, *Episodes of Insect Life*. New York: J. S. Redfield, Clinton Hall, 1851.

FIG. 5 From E. van Bruyssel, *The Population of An Old Pear-Tree; or, Stories of Insect Life*. New York: Macmillan and Co., 1870.



Each day Willard Metcalf, a superb naturalist as well as artist, and myself went out walking to observe the changes and progress of the horde or brood as they are technically named. Like a snake, the cicada nymph must shed its skin (exuviae) in order to enter the next stage of life as a winged adult. We would find the molted skins still clinging to branches like ghosts or statues to a life past. We began to gather them since Metcalf had begun collecting natural specimens for a kind of cabinet of wonder he had started while living in France (See *Pl. [Metcalf cabinet]*) The nymph skins would make a fine addition to a collection that already consisted of bird nests, eggs, butterflies, and moths. That said, their numbers far exceeded anything that Metcalf might have possibly fit within his cabinet. We were able to collect them by the bushel; yet we continued to gather them because they moved us. (Fig. 6) They were strangely poignant reminders of life in transition.

So many did we collect that I remarked to Metcalf that they reminded me of popcorn for they were the size of a popped kernel and similarly crunchy, not that I ever ate one to test! Jokingly, I suggested we string them like a holiday popcorn chain, and that is how we came up with the idea to host a party at Miss Florence's inspired by insects! This suggestion was met with general enthusiasm by the "Hot Air Club" (our name for the sociable group of artists who gathered on the boardinghouse porch for meals on warm days) who were always looking for an excuse for merriment. (Fig. 7) However, Miss Florence herself had to be coaxed. (Fig. 8) She allowed that butterflies were lovely and beetles often intriguing with their shiny armor, but confided that she found the cicadas quite repugnant. By this time, most of the nymphs had transformed into winged adults and happily serenaded us throughout the day. "I can't walk outside without one getting caught in my hair and another dozen attaching themselves to my clothing!" she exclaimed. And this was quite true. Not only were they ungainly flyers frequently batting us in the face, but as such they were easy prey for the local wildlife. It was not uncommon to see birds, frogs, turtles, and even dogs and cats in a gluttonous stupor with a wing casually dangling from their mouths. Quite an unappealing sight!

"But just look at their beauty," I cajoled, having placed my beekeeping netted helmet carefully over Miss Florence's head as a means of protection. I walked

FIG. 6
Jennifer Angus, Drawer from *Cabinet of Curiosities*, 2019. Wooden hardware cabinet, glass, insect specimens, mixed media



her to a nearby tree, and we stood watching as from a nymph skin slowly emerged a pure white cicada. I knew from my earlier observations that in a matter of hours the cicada would harden, transforming to the familiar brown body with clear wings, but in this moment, it was a creature of ethereal beauty. Miss Florence seemed transfixed. "It's a bit like Cinderella," she observed. And indeed, so many insects go through a metamorphosis that is quite as magical as any fairy tale. I remarked to Miss Florence that fairies most often had wings not dissimilar from cicadas and other winged insects, and I believe that this romantic vision is what convinced her. (Fig. 9) Always one for a party, particularly a masquerade, it was simply the insect theme that had made her hesitate. As we returned to the house, I recited in a sing-song voice Vachel Lindsay's popular poem:



FIG. 7
John R. Baynes, Jr., The Hot Air Club, ca. 1906. Lyme Historical Society Archives, Photographs: Lyme Art Colony, Box 1, 70018.56, Florence Griswold Museum

FIG. 8
Florence Griswold in about 1910. Lyme Historical Society Archives, Florence Griswold Museum



The Grasshopper, the grasshopper,
I will explain to you:—
He is the Brownies' racehorse,
The fairies' Kangaroo.⁵

We set about plans for the party to be held in six weeks – a time when the roar of our insect inspiration would no longer be quite so deafening. It would be a masquerade, of course. That was the easy part because we desired to transform the house, and that would require significantly more thought. We were all excited about Metcalf's cabinet of wonder, and it was decided that party guests would be invited to help create a *Wunderkammer*.⁶ An old hardware cabinet was located in a barn. The drawers were removed and distributed in advance to the invited guests with the following invitation:

FIG. 9
From Acheta Domestica, *Episodes of Insect Life*. Second Series. New York: J. S. Redfield, Clinton Hall, 1851.

5 Vachel Lindsay, "An Explanation of the Grasshopper," in *The Congo and Other Poems* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), 97.

6 German name for cabinet of curiosities or cabinet of wonder.



Come take up your Hats, and away let us haste
To the *Butterfly's* Ball, and the *Grasshopper's* Feast.
The Trumpeter, *Gad-fly*, has summon'd the Crew,
And the Revels are now only waiting for you.⁷

We encouraged the guests to consider the magic and wonder of insects as well as their industriousness, as observed in social insects such as ants and bees. (Fig. 10) The contents of the drawers were to reflect the most admirable six-legged world! So popular an activity did this become that many guests finished their drawer and started to create other cabinets of curiosity. (Pl. [ArtistsBedroomDetail]) They used old sewing spool cabinets, small valises, and Childe Hassam decided to use the glass dome from an old carriage clock that no longer kept time. This clock had sat in Miss Florence's upstairs parlor for as long

7 William Roscoe, *The Butterflies Ball and the Grasshoppers Feast* (London: Griffith & Farran, 1883), xiv.

FIG. 10
Painter Insect from Acheta Domestica, *Episodes of Insect Life*. Second Series. New York: J. S. Redfield, Clinton Hall, 1851.



as anyone could remember with its hands stuck at a quarter past two. As this time was only correct twice a day, one of which was in the middle of the night, it was felt that the dome could be put to better purpose. Putting specimens beneath glass was a well-worn tradition from an earlier generation. I recall that within my grandfather's library was a collection of glass domes some of which held insects, small mammals, shells, and minerals. One contained several colourful birds positioned so as to appear as about to take flight. As a curious child I found it most perplexing that three birds, a North American blue bird, a purple-throated hummingbird from South America, and a European robin should congregate together so far from home.

Hassam's bell jar started a new wave of frenetic activity, for we realized that the glass of the jar reminded us all of the clear iridescent wings of the cicadas which swarmed our surroundings. More and more people started to construct delightful scenes under glass having removed earlier moth eaten (how appropriate!) taxidermy creations. (Pl. [Parlor]) All of the imaginative activity was inspiring although I began to wonder whether guests would be able to navigate the house with all these delicate objects. Ah well! Far be it for me to dampen the creative spirit.

As the summer progressed, the cicadas, to use an entomological expression, began to drop like flies. Having sung their sweet song, mated and secreted their eggs, they expired. Metcalf, Harry Hoffman, and I began to scoop up the deceased, for we had a plan. Initially we had desired to transform the boardinghouse into a bee hive since it certainly was a hive activity but practically speaking this was quite impossible for any number of reasons. With the cicadas so plentiful we decided that we would mount them upon the wall in the entrance hall placing them in patterns reminiscent of wallpaper. (Fig. 11) The patterns brought order and control to the wildness and chaos the emergence of the periodical cicadas had brought to Old Lyme. Placed in this manner one could take the time to observe the lacelike wings of the creatures which serene in death could not possibly pose a threat to anyone suffering from entomophobia.



11

FIG. 11
Jennifer Angus, *Insect Wallpaper*, 2019, Pattern of insect specimens including cicadas, grasshoppers, and leaf mimic insects on gatorboard, 80 x 509 in.



12



With plans underway for the transformation of the house we turned to the party's menu! Miss Florence firmly put her foot down and said that insects would not be served in her establishment and further more even if we had dipped crickets in chocolate or cheese, the two things that make any food palatable, only the inebriated would likely partake. Thus, it was decided that the refreshments would simply be inspired by insects such as "grasshopper pie," a delicious chocolate and mint concoction, small cakes with cicadas rendered in icing, butterfly-shaped biscuits and the like. My fellow artists were a bit disappointed but they cheered as we planned cocktails with insect names such as the June Bug, the Grasshopper, and the Barking Spider.

While we had given up the notion of serving actual insects, Hoffman came up with the brilliant plan to create party favors for the guests. One afternoon the "Hot Air Club" was discussing all things insect when Metcalf remarked that he had seen ancient insects trapped in amber during a visit to the Museum of Natural History in New York City.

"Imagine if a grasshopper was preserved in crabapple jelly, that's how it appeared," he casually said.

"Preserves!" yelled Hoffman. "That's it! Let's preserve insects in jelly and hand them out as party favours."

Obsessed as we were about insects, and captivated by Metcalf's description of the amber, sly glances were shared around the table followed by raucous laughter. "Yes!" we exclaimed in unison. Miss Florence needn't worry about her reputation. Insects would not be consumed on the premises as the jelly would be distributed for the guests to take home and they could decide for themselves if they dared try it. Over a long weekend in which Miss Florence had travelled to New York City to visit friends, we prepared dozens and dozens of jars of "royal jelly" preserves with some very reluctant assistance from the cook, "Barefoot Mary."⁸ (Fig. 12)

At last came the day of the party! The hall was adorned with the cicada wallpaper and our large cabinet of curiosities was prominently displayed for all to explore with the smaller ones distributed throughout the other rooms. In the front parlor the bell jars sparkled like the very cicada wings that had inspired them. In the dining room, the table was laden with food and beverage as well as a centerpiece inspired by a Dutch memento mori still life painting of edibles and insects.⁹ (Fig. 12) In the pantry and any other available space were stacked our party favours of insect preserves.

We donned our costumes which ranged from the quite frightening — bees, wasps, grasshoppers, and even a stag beetle — to the enchanting. (Fig. 14) Women in butterfly and fairy-like costumes flitted about from room to room, colourful cocktails in hand as if they were sipping nectar from a flower. (Fig. 14) A popular gentlemen's costume was the fly — simply by donning driving goggles they looked like bug-eyed creatures. There were several people in beekeeper outfits walking around with smokers used for subduing bees when extracting honey from hives. While the smoke from these devices created an even more theatrical



FIG. 12
Jennifer Angus's work in the Dining Room (detail) of the Florence Griswold House, 2019

8 Royal jelly is produced by bees and fed to larvae which will grow to be a colony's new queen.

9 Theory and practice of reflection on mortality, especially as a means of considering the vanity of earthly life and the transient nature of all earthly goods and pursuits.

FIG. 13
Bessie Potter Dancing, ca. 1900. Bessie Potter Vonnoh Album, Private Collection

FIG. 14
Unknown winged woman, 1922. Courtesy of Jennifer Angus

ambience to the party, if that were possible, they were eventually abandoned as people coughed and spluttered.

The standout costume of the evening was worn by Miss Florence herself. In a cape embellished with real green metallic beetle wings, she presided over the festivities like the queen she was of our colony – a group of industrious artists rather than ants or bees! Like moths to the flame, every guest came forward to greet her, marveling at her costume as they admired mother nature’s sequins, aptly named jewel beetles.

As the evening progressed the guests became bolder and more raucous. Someone banged out Rimsky-Korsakov’s “Flight of the Bumblebee” on the piano, and people buzzed and flitted about the house in a dance inspired by insect flight.¹⁰ As the party was winding down, Matilda Browne stood on a chair in the hallway tapping a wine glass. That brought us all to attention. She wore a lovely green silk dress, a fitted cap, goggles, and a fairy-like pair of wings.

As silence fell Matilda recited the words of Aesop’s fable, “The Grasshopper and the Ant:”

The Ants were spending a fine winter’s day drying grain collected in the summertime. A Grasshopper, perishing with famine, passed by and earnestly begged for a little food. The Ants inquired of him, “Why did you not treasure up food during the summer?” He replied, “I had not leisure enough. I passed the days in singing.” They then said in derision: “If you were foolish enough to sing all the summer, you must dance supperless to bed in the winter.”¹¹

“Are we ants or are we grasshoppers?” Matilda exclaimed.

This was a fine philosophical question. In the fable, the grasshopper has traditionally represented the artist. The implication is that he is lazy and passing his time making merry while others, the ants, work hard in preparation for leaner times. Yet the grasshopper works full time to provide music which feeds the soul



¹⁰ From the opera *Tsar of Saltan*, 1899.

¹¹ Reverend George Townsend, “The Grasshopper and the Ant,” in *Three Hundred Aesop’s Fables, Literally Translated from the Greek* (New York: George Routledge & Sons, 1867), 6.

15



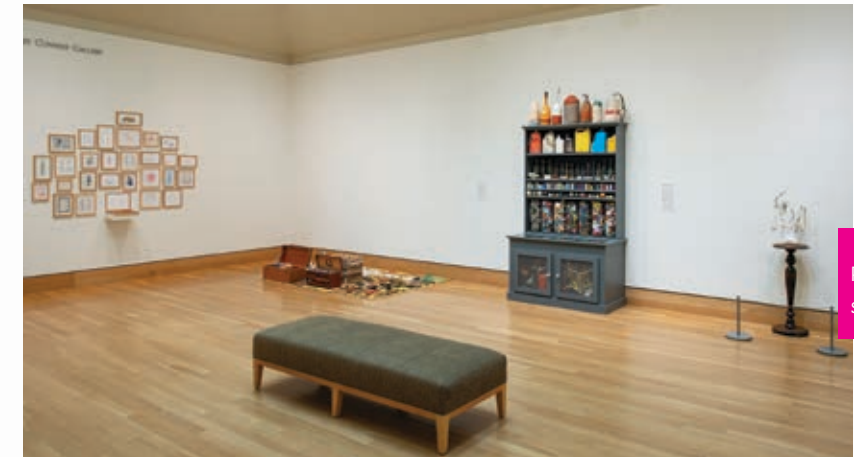
if not the belly. The majority of guests cried out “Grasshopper!” but some declared that there was a new hybrid species called an “ant-hopper” or a “grass-ant” that embodied characteristics of both species. Matilda heard them out and then declared, “I am the Grasshopper. Art is a necessity of life!”

And on that note, there was a final toast to insects and art, and the guests took their leave. Like a mayfly that lives but a single day, they had laughed, danced, and then faded into the black of the night.

FIG. 15
Jennifer Angus, *Miss Florence’s Costume*, 2019. 56 in. tall, Velvet cape hand-embroidered with iridescent green beetle wings

PLATES

*Fragile Earth:
The Naturalist Impulse in Contemporary Art*

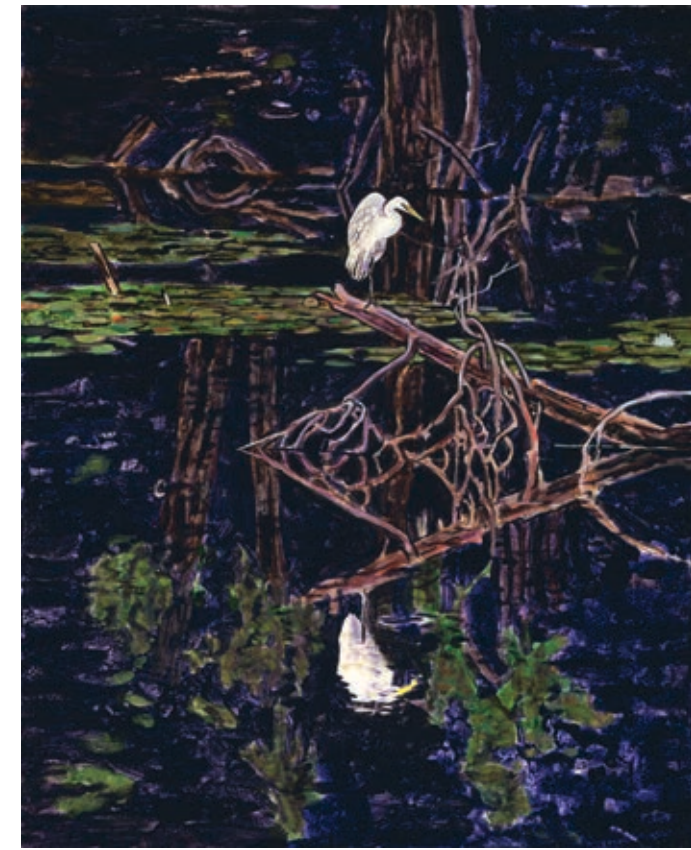


Puritan pls remove stanchions



James Prosek, *Plants from field*, 2018. Watercolor study, 22 x 9 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York

James Prosek, *Plants from pond*, 2018. Watercolor study, 22 x 9 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York



James Prosek, *Pond no. 1*, 2018. Watercolor and acrylic on panel, 12 x 15 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York

James Prosek, *Pond no. 2*, 2018. Watercolor and acrylic on panel, 15 x 12 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York



James Prosek, *Flying Squirrels*, 2013. Taxidermy squirrels, quail and duck wings, clay flowers, moss and wood, 26 x 17 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York



James Prosek, *Striped Bass*, 2017. Oil and acrylic on panel, 33 3/4 x 42 in. Florence Griswold Museum, Purchase

James Prosek, *Black Sea Bass*, 2011. Watercolor, gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on tea-stained paper, 25 x 32 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York



James Prosek's silhouette-style paintings take inspiration from the endpapers of a seminal field guide by renowned Old Lyme naturalist Roger Tory Peterson, who revolutionized birding by encouraging people to identify species by observation, rather than hunting. (Fig. [Peterson endpapers]) For *Fragile Earth*, Prosek's monumental mural thematizes the land and sea by picturing the shore of the Lieutenant River (part of the Long Island Sound estuary) outside the galleries, as well as the Barbizon Oak, located a quarter mile from the Museum's property. The Barbizon Oak is one of the oldest trees in the state and was famously painted by Lyme Colony artists like Henry Ward Ranger (Figs.). By incorporating the oak into his mural, Prosek follows in the footsteps of Peterson, Ranger, and countless others attracted to Old Lyme's forests, which reminded the artists of the historic Forest of Fontainebleau near the art colony village of Barbizon, in France.

In Peterson's field guides, and with dioramas in natural history museums, animal silhouettes are identified using a corresponding numerical key. Here Prosek frustrates our desire to know and name by withholding a key. Instead, the viewer is encouraged to examine the animal's form without the crutch of language, thwarting our instinct to possess and dominate nature. Prosek's mural reflects the irony and difficulty of naming and understanding nature—for nature is always changing, and what it is exceeds what we call it.

Superimposed on the mural are two of the artist's fish paintings. Just as naturalists like John James Audubon and Louis Agassiz Fuertes traveled to observe the subjects of their paintings in life, Prosek has journeyed around the world to study fish as they come out of the water. As the fish lays on the boat deck, still pulsing with life, and the sun reflects off its scales, Prosek creates sketches and detailed notes. He explains, "These paintings of fish in a way are self-portraits—as much about me as they are about the fish. In the larger fish I have painted my reflection in the fish's eye, leaning over the fish. I'm not documenting a species, I'm painting an experience."¹ Prosek maintains that every representation of nature is a kind of distortion—nature's dynamism is ever in flux, and cannot be transferred or completely captured by any medium.

1 James Prosek, "Interview with JD Talasek, Director," in *James Prosek: Ocean Fishes & Taxonomy* (Washington, D.C.: Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences, 2012), n.p.

Fig. _: Photograph of family copy of Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds* ([edition date to come]), inscribed by James Prosek's father, Louis Prosek

Fig. _: Henry Ward Ranger, *Autumn Woodlands*, 1902. Oil on canvas, 28 in. x 36 in. Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Mr. Israel Liverant

Fig. _: James Prosek with the Barbizon Oak, January 2019, Old Lyme, Connecticut (facing page) James Prosek, *Old Lyme by Land and Sea*, 2019. Acrylic paint on sheet rock, 240 x 360 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York

Prosek's work comments on the interconnectedness of the ecosystem using the freshwater eel as a case study. Most migratory fish spawn in fresh water and travel to the ocean to live their adult lives. However, freshwater eels—*Anguilla*—do the opposite, spawning in the Sargasso Sea in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and migrating to lakes and rivers of Europe and Eastern North America. Ten to thirty years later they make an amazing migration from local waters (like the Lieutenant River bordering the Museum's property) back to the ocean to lay their eggs where they were born. Inspired by a Japanese technique called Gyotaku, Prosek paints the bodies of eels and uses them to create prints that imagine the miraculous, and little-understood, spawning in the Sargasso. In *Abstract Nature* he manifests the eel's likeness directly through marks made with its own body. In this way the artist lets nature speak for itself.

Paired with *Abstract Nature*, an installation of eel spears from Prosek's personal collection explores what the artist calls "the line between artifact and art" to consider the sculptural, symbolic, and practical functions of these objects.² Among the examples are 19th-century spears hand-forged by blacksmiths in such places as Denmark, France, Italy, Long Island, Cape Cod, and New London, Connecticut. On tags tied to the spears Prosek's handwriting records the location and date in which they were collected. One was purchased by the artist as a birthday present to himself, while another was found on a trip with Mark Dion to the New Bedford Whaling Museum in a nearby flea market. (See Fig. [in dialogue])

The spears are tools for hunting and dominating fish, but Prosek's display brings our attention to their beauty. Each one can be appreciated as a unique work of art, carefully designed and crafted by hand. The positive and negative space created by the spears' dark iron handles and many prongs juxtaposed against the white gallery wall make a strong graphic impact. Within the gallery space these objects of material culture create both an aesthetic and conceptual dialogue with the eel prints and nearby painted silhouette wall. Visually they speak to each other through the echoing of black and white forms. Conceptually the spears aid viewers in conjuring the physical experience of encountering an eel's body, like the prints, through the type of weapon required to harness its slippery, strong, and agile physique. They invoke the physicality involved in the primal activity of hunting, as well as the ferocity and ultimate fatality—for while the hunter gains a catch, the eel faces a violent death and the ecosystem loses an important contributor.

At the bottom, Prosek has inserted three spears he designed that evolve from a utilitarian tool into something non-functional, whose prongs curve decoratively. He asks, "Is a useless tool still a tool?" What is the line between form and function for a work of art? While these tools originally functioned to spear animals, they now serve as vessels of communication for an environmentally conscious artist. Eels have persisted for millions of years, but populations are now declining due to dams, overfishing, pollution, and global climate change. Prosek's art argues for environmental vigilance 'at home' in order to protect nature worldwide.



² James Prosek, conversation with the author, March 2019.



James Prosek, *Abstract Nature*, 2009. Eel stamped with sumi ink on paper, 96 x 120 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York
With installation of hand-forged iron eel spears, 2019. 80 x 107 in., and *Burned Bowl with Lemon Egg*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York

Myth of Order series

With these sculptures Prosek investigates the ways in which humans have insisted on shaping nature for our own needs—how we have tried to control it or put it in a box. The birch branches have been cut, wired, and painted to simulate unnatural geometric shapes, like the square-shaped *Myth of Order III* (2014) and the perfectly round birch branch of *Myth of Order V* (2015).

Prosek questions the utility of taxonomic systems invented by scientists like Carl Linnaeus, who devised the two-name system (genus and species) for organisms in the 18th century. This structure of labeling, though necessary for communication, fragments nature and does not account for its fluidity, which exists in a holistic and constantly changing arena. The sculptures' sprouting foliage interrupts the controlled system of the branches to suggest the "myth of order." Nature cannot be contained by boundaries, nor will it entirely conform or bend to our will.

For *Fragile Earth*, Prosek created the heart-shaped *Tree Emoji* (*Myth of Order VI*). This piece explores how humans are returning to prehistoric forms of language by communicating with shapes, such as digital emojis, instead of words. Prosek's heart sculpture also points to the artificiality of language, or even art, for the invented design does not resemble the biological profile of any organism's beating heart.

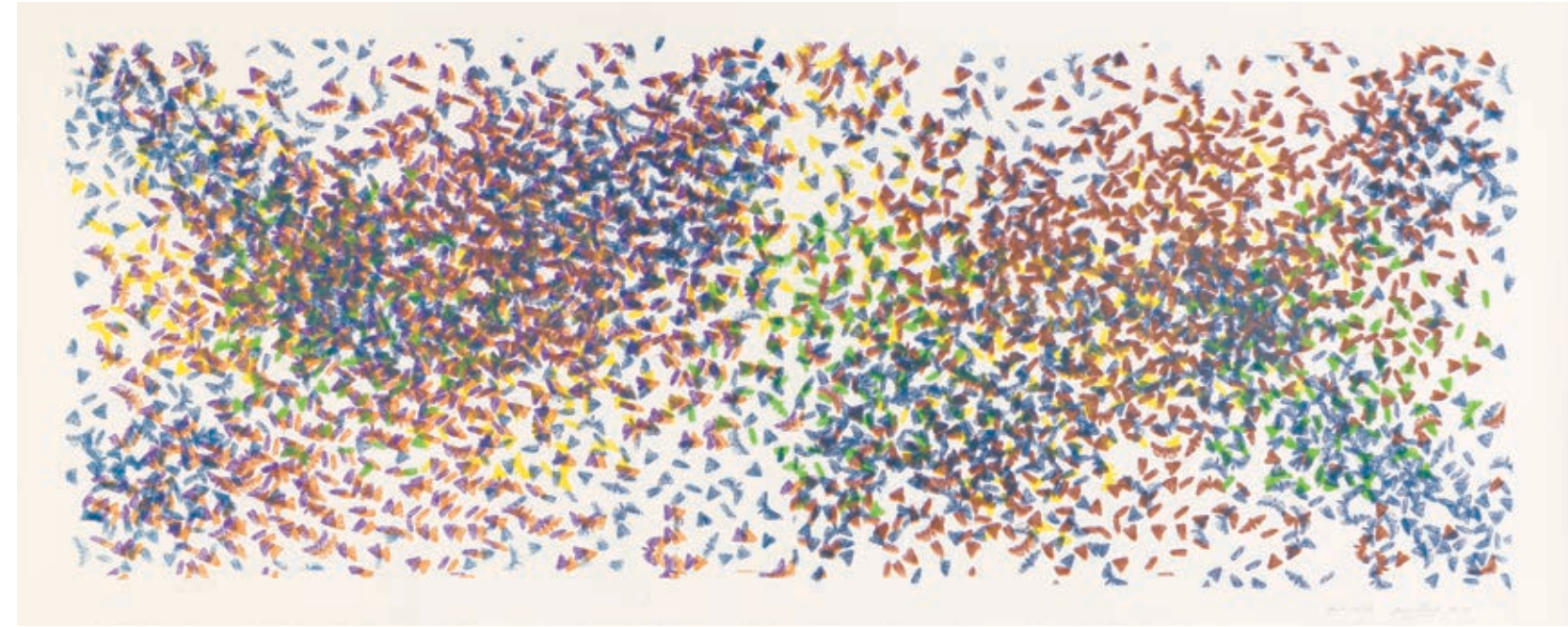
add contrast to
all 3 photos



James Prosek, *Myth of Order III*, 2014. Birch branches, clay, acrylic paint, 14 x 18 x 3 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York

James Prosek, *Tree Emoji (Myth of Order VI)*, 2019. Birch branches, clay, acrylic paint, 13 x 12 1/2 x 3 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York

James Prosek, *Myth of Order V*, 2015. Birch branches, clay, acrylic paint, 15 x 15 x 6 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York



James Prosek, *Moth Cluster IV*, 2016. Pen, ink, and silkscreen on paper, 60 x 130 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York

James Prosek, *Burned bowl with Lemon Egg*, 2016. Bronze, oil paint, 10 x 6 in. Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York

COURTNEY MATTISON



Courtney Mattison, *Afterglow (Our Changing Seas VI)*, 2018. Glazed stoneware and porcelain, 7.5 x 8.5 x 1.6 ft. Courtesy of the artist

Courtney Mattison, *Afterglow (Our Changing Seas VI)* (details), 2018. Glazed stoneware and porcelain, 7.5 x 8.5 x 1.6 ft. Courtesy of the artist



THE WILLIAM E. PHILLIPS & BARBARA SMITH GALLERY



Courtney Mattison's *Malum Geminos* explores the stress responses of coral reefs triggered by rising sea temperatures and the ocean's changing chemical composition. The title *Malum Geminos* translates to "evil twins," and takes its Latin name from a statement made by scientist Dr. Jane Lubchenco at the 2009 United Nations climate talks in Copenhagen. She referred to ocean acidification as the "equally evil twin" of climate change, caused by carbon dioxide emissions dissolving into the sea. As Lubchenco has described, "Another way to think of ocean acidification is as osteoporosis of the seas."³ The warming waters triggered by climate change are causing corals to sicken and bleach, and ocean acidification is slowing and eroding their skeletal growth. Lubchenco explains that as the oceans become more acidic, it's harder for corals and organisms like crabs and clams to make their shells. (p. 47) The change in seawater chemistry is also affecting how fish locate protective habitats and prey, putting the food chain at risk. Moreover, the ocean is making and holding less oxygen, which is crucial for the survival of all life on Earth. Studies show that within our lifetimes human activities like fossil fuel use, harmful fishing practices, and pollution could wipe out coral reefs. Although the term is less well known, ocean acidification may be a problem as proportionately significant as global warming.

Mattison's intricately sculpted forms branch across the wall in a pattern that evokes the fate of bleached and eroding reefs. She describes how the work visualizes "clusters of gelatinous white polyps that appear to have had their supportive skeletons dissolved by acidic seawater." (p. 47) The artist's expert knowledge of her materials contributes to the at-once realistic and fantastical effect, with layered glazes adding to the appearance of breakdown. The intricate shapes, hand-formed by coiling, feel simultaneously natural and designed, recalling the legendary illustrations of German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919). Encountering this piece in the gallery evokes an emotional sense of what it would be like to float above a dying reef. Its forms protrude aggressively into the viewer's space, with the center extending nearly two feet from the wall. Similar to *Afterglow*, which can be seen as evolving into a positive or negative outcome, the viewer may interpret the mood of *Malum Geminos*. While some may construe a graveyard of skeletal forms and experience foreboding, grief, or melancholy, others might find productive strength and ferocity in the work as a powerful call for action.



Courtney Mattison, *Malum Geminos* (detail), 2019. Glazed stoneware and porcelain, 84 x 250 x 22 in.

Courtney Mattison sculpting *Malum Geminos* in her Los Angeles studio, with *Texture Study I* in process nearby, March 2019. Courtesy of the artist

(previous spread) Courtney Mattison, *Malum Geminos*, 2019. Glazed stoneware and porcelain, 84 x 250 x 22 in.

³ Dr. Jane Lubchenco quoted in "Acidic oceans: The 'evil twin' of warming," *Associated Press*, December 22, 2009, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/34491541/ns/us_news-environment/t/acidic-oceans-evil-twin-warming/.

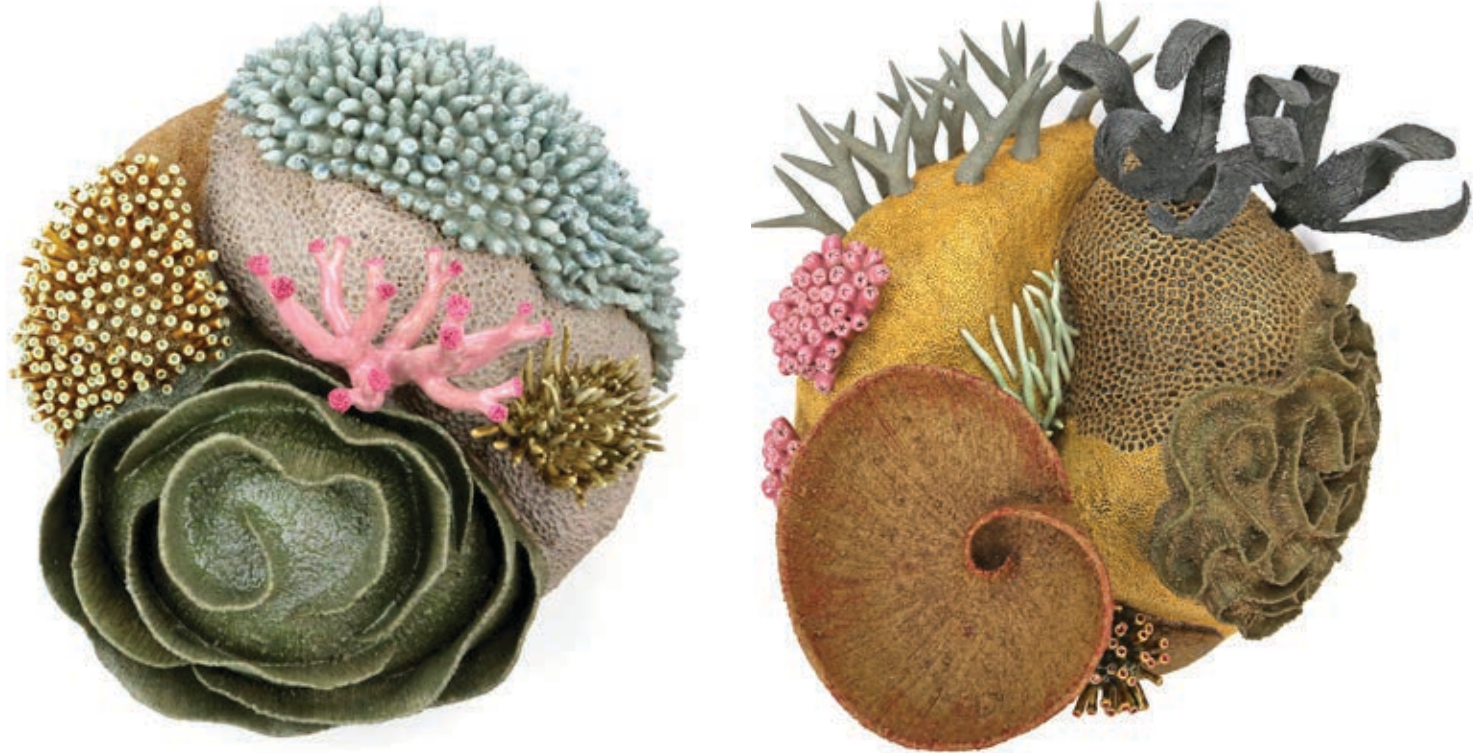


Courtney Mattison's most recent work imagines the future of coral reefs if the devastating effects of climate change and pollution continue at their current rate. Corals are so sensitive that the smallest change in their ecosystem can cause devastation. Scientists predict that most reef systems will be in decline by 2100 unless carbon emissions are reduced.⁴

Newly conceived for the *Fragile Earth* exhibition, *Texture Study I* explores the dangerous homogenization of coral reef species. While a diversity of life characterizes a healthy ecosystem, climate change and other forms of human-caused habitat destruction are triggering more resilient species to become invasive while less hearty species begin to go extinct. As Mattison explains, in this sculpture "one type of tube sponge swirls outward and fills a geometric space." (p. 48) The tubular forms sway with life, as if suspended in sea water. For some viewers the distinct color may evoke bodily associations, referencing other members of the animal world, like that of raw meat or organs exposed during a surgical procedure, thus underscoring that corals are living animals and not plants (a common misunderstanding). Mattison creates the lifelike texture of sea sponges through a combination of intricate, repetitive hand-tooling as well as by understanding the chemistry of her materials. The reaction of silicon carbide in the glaze brought on by firing contributes to the frothy-looking consistency of the sponges' surface. The sculpture's movement, paired with its associative color and unique texture, creates an effect both beautiful and slightly unsettling. Although tube sponges are not expected to become invasive, Mattison describes her recent *Texture Study* series as an experiment "with monochromatic vignettes of what the seafloor might look like in a post-mass-extinction future." (p. 48)

Courtney Mattison, *Texture Study I*, 2019. Glazed stoneware, 59 x 59 x 22 in.

⁴ Laura Parker and Craig Welch, "Coral Reefs Could Be Gone in 30 Years," *National Geographic* (June 23, 2017), <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/06/coral-reef-bleaching-global-warming-unesco-sites/>.



Courtney Mattison, *Coral Sea II*, 2015. Glazed stoneware and porcelain, 17 x 16 1/2 x 11 in. Courtesy of the artist

Courtney Mattison, *Coral Triangle II*, 2015. Glazed stoneware and porcelain, 19 x 17 x 9 in. Courtesy of the artist



Courtney Mattison, *Micronesia Islands II*, 2015. Glazed stoneware and porcelain, 17 x 17 x 12 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist

Courtney Mattison, *Sargasso Sea II*, 2015. Glazed stoneware and porcelain, 18 x 18 x 6 in. Courtesy of the artist

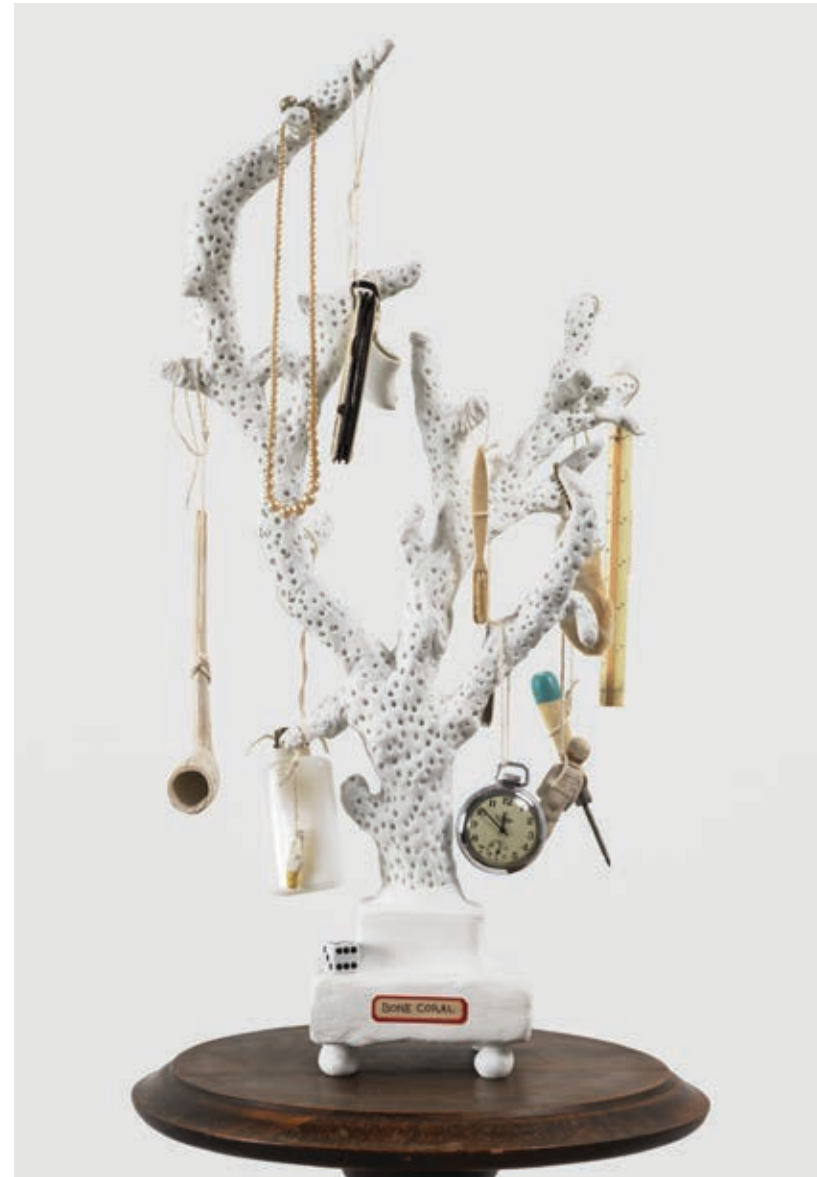
MARK DION

Bone Coral evokes a narrative that links the ocean's surface with its depths. It conjures an underwater cemetery for refuse that has sunk to the ocean floor and come to rest on the 'bones' of bleached coral. However, the pedestal and label indicate the coral skeleton's newfound environment—a museum or a cabinet of curiosity. The symbolic objects hanging from the coral's limbs invite us to imagine what type of collection this may be. Has the coral become a decorative storage device, a catchall for discarded things, or a symbolic reflection of its collector?

Dion brings our attention to the haunting practice of recasting living things as trophies for ornament and bragging rights. In this case it illustrates what he calls "oceanocide," the destruction of the sea by the pillaging of its resources.⁵ This mournful assemblage reminds us that a collection is formed through acts of colonial conquest. The object of wonder has been taken from the sea and rendered lifeless for another use, with indifference to the environmental consequences.

Earlier in his career Dion used real animals and taxidermy in his work, but more recently he employs imitations as in *Nature Morte* (See p. 85). This shift interrogates the difference between specimens and sculpture, and our fascination with authenticity. Dion problematizes these issues in regards to natural history museum displays. Visitors enter such institutions to encounter something "real," but the "official story" of nature has been constructed from a human perspective shaped by colonialism and capitalism. Many of the specimens were taken from other cultures. Putting them on display in a museum transforms them into objects for consumption, where capital is created through ticket sales.

Dion explains that one of the features that distinguishes humans from other species "is the ability to transform environments to fit our requirements. This skill has changed the face of the planet."⁶ In *Nature Morte* the artist alludes to this transformation with a penguin seated in a bucket of tar and trinkets. The trinkets gesture to the practice of collecting (including Dion's own approach to artmaking) and the fate of man-made objects on this earth. The tar symbolizes man's negligent treatment of nature—as byproducts of petroleum production—or following oil spills, when tar balls pollute waters and wash up on beaches, harming wildlife. The title of this piece, *Nature Morte* (literally "dead nature" in French), reflects this toxic reality.



Mark Dion, *Bone Coral*, 2018. Resin and assorted objects, 56 1/2 x 12 3/4 x 12 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles

5 Mark Dion, "Oceanophilia / Oceanocide, 2011," in *The Incomplete Writings of Mark Dion: Selected Interviews, Fragments, and Miscellany*, ed. Roel Arkesteijn (Fieldwork Museum, 2017), 413-415.

6 Mark Dion, "CalArts application, 2001," in *The Incomplete Writings of Mark Dion*, 8.

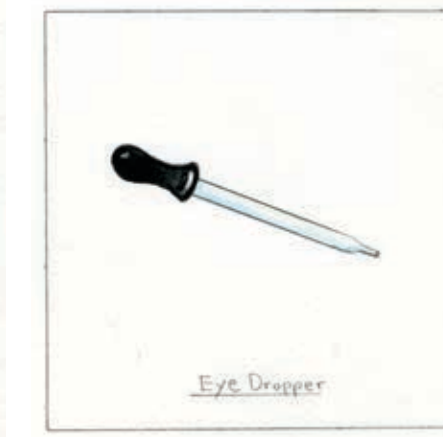
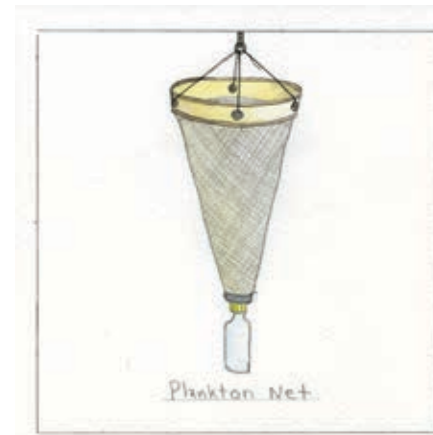
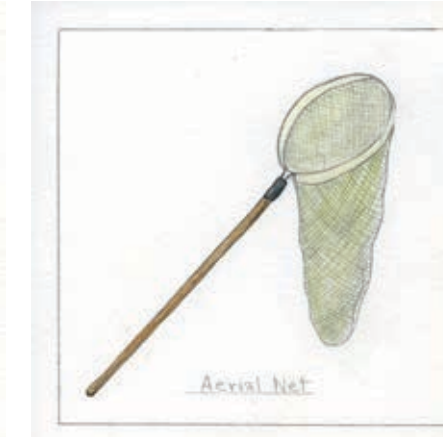
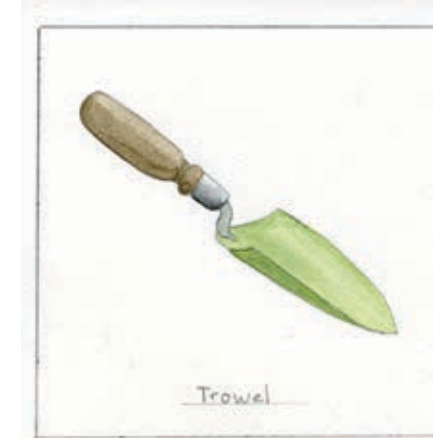
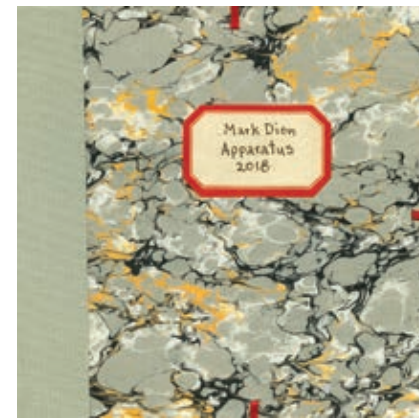


Mark Dion, *Nature Morte*, 2018. Ceramic penguin, tar, metal bucket, various dime store trinkets and costume jewelry, 38 3/4 x 10 7/8 x 10 3/4 in. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles



Mark Dion, *Travels of William Bartram Reconsidered (equipment)*, 2008. Tarp, hand nets, wood cases, leaf presses, hand tools, nature books, and maps, 17 x 90 1/2 x 65 in. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles

Mark Dion, *Apparatus*, 2018. Portfolio book containing 20 drawings and packet of insect pins, 7 1/4 x 7 1/4 x 3/4 in (portfolio), 5 1/8 x 5 1/8 in (each drawing). Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles





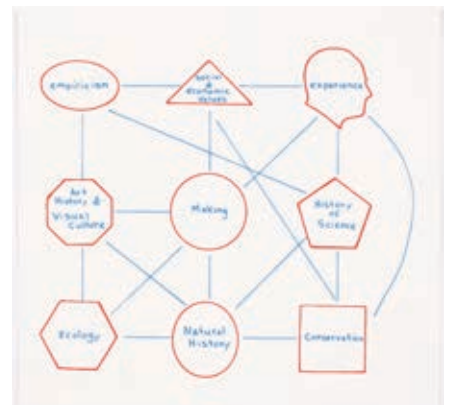
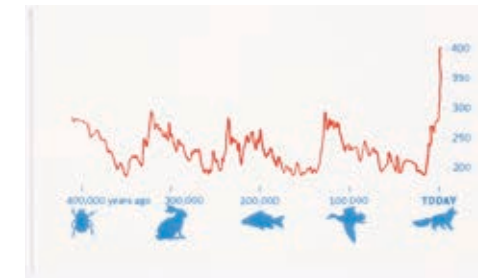
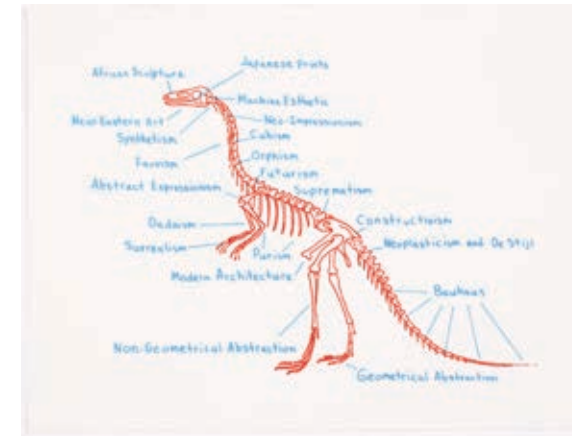
Mark Dion, *Hunting Standards (Felt)*, 2012. Set of 4 silkscreen prints on colored felt, 16 x 20 in. each, Edition of 20 with 12 Aps. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles



Mark Dion, *Fragments of Travel, Exploration and Adventure*, 2007. Artist book, 12 3/4 x 10 3/8 x 1 in. Edition of 36; 9 Aps, Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles



Mark Dion, *World in a Box*, 2015, Set of 27 prints; lithography, cyanotype, digital, screenprint, etching, letterpress and woodcut in a custom-made oak wood storage box with etching / letterpress cover image (on lid) and lithograph inventory list (inside lid), 13 1/8 x 10 3/16 x 1 1/8 in. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles



Mark Dion curates the collection

For a section of his gallery Mark Dion curated a selection of objects from the Florence Museum's collection which has particular relevance with his own interests and practice.

Willard Metcalf's *Naturalist Collection Chest* served as the catalyst for this exhibition and its 2017 prequel, *Flora/Fauna: The Naturalist Impulse in American Art*, which explored the longstanding connections between art and natural history. An American Impressionist artist and amateur naturalist, Metcalf filled the cabinet's twenty-eight drawers with hundreds of bird eggs, moths, butterflies, and nests. He began collecting in the 1870s but the earliest examples in this cabinet come from Giverny, France in 1885, where Metcalf visited Claude Monet and tutored his son in botany and ornithology. He gathered additional specimens during summer visits to Florence Griswold's boardinghouse between 1905 and 1907. Metcalf's cabinet reveals how the process of collecting traditionally formed a significant aspect of the study of natural history. As Dion describes, "In order to know nature we somehow feel like it must be possessed, killed, and preserved."⁷

As the driving inspiration for the contemporary cabinet Dion created for *Fragile Earth*, the inclusion of Metcalf's cabinet in the artist's gallery creates a dialogue between historical and contemporary practices of artist-naturalists. Metcalf's cabinet also motivated the Museum to invite Jennifer Angus, who makes her own cabinets of curiosities, to become the institution's first Artist-in-Residence. (Pls. [Angus cabinet & drawers])



Willard L. Metcalf (1858–1925), *Naturalist Collection Chest*, ca. 1885–1925. Mahogany wood containing a collection of butterflies, moths, bird eggs, nests and supporting documents, 64 ½ x 42 ¼ x 14 ½ in. Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Mrs. Henriette A. Metcalf

⁷ Mark Dion, email with the author, November 2018.



Dion's interests connect to the Lyme Impressionist Harry Hoffman via the renowned naturalist William Beebe (1877–1962). Beebe was curator of ornithology at the New York Zoological Garden and director of the Tropical Research Department at the New York Zoological Society. He has inspired several of Dion's projects, including *A Meter of Jungle* (1992) and a recent exhibition at The Drawing Center, New York (2017). (Fig. [Portrait of Dion after Beebe]) Beebe recognized art's importance as a means of sharing scientific research and discoveries about nature with the general public, aiding the cause of conservation. Identifying Hoffman's talent as a marine artist, he invited him to join three expeditions in the 1920s to study tropical flora and fauna in the Galápagos, British Guiana, and Bermuda.

On the 1923 expedition to the Galápagos Islands, Hoffman was tasked with making undersea paintings, but he was disappointed to find very little coral life among the ledges of black lava. For this painting made on the largest island of the Galápagos, he instead looked skyward to observe frigate birds. The frigate has the largest wingspan to bodyweight ratio of any bird in the world, allowing it to glide airborne for days at a time. The Spanish nicknamed them "pirate birds," and "Man o' War" due to their habit of stealing food from other birds. The large tropical population of these birds would have made them a frequent presence in the sky.

William Beebe's expedition team endeavored to bring back birds and reptiles for the New York Zoological Park and to collect specimens for the American Museum of Natural History. (Fig. [Hoffman w Beebe expedition team])

Situated along the equator about 500 miles west of Ecuador, the Galápagos is an archipelago of volcanic islands. This marine iguana appears at home upon the ledges of black lava that characterized the landscape. Like other unusual species that have adapted to life there, the marine iguana is only found in the Galápagos.

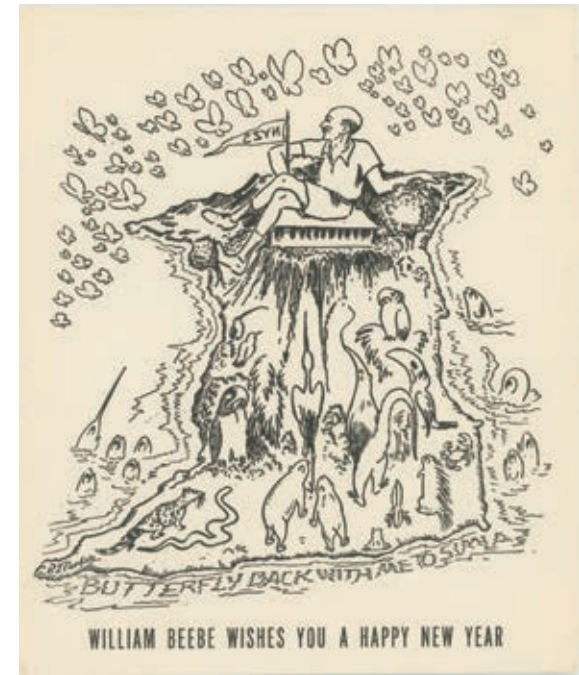
Harry L. Hoffman (1871–1964), *Man-o'-War Birds, Isabela Island*, ca. 1923. Oil on canvas, 24 x 26 in. Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of David and Suzanne Hoffman and the Hoffman family

Harry L. Hoffman (1871–1964), *Amblyrhynchus, Marine Iguana, Galápagos*, ca. 1923. Oil on canvas, 24 x 26 in. Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of David and Suzanne Hoffman and the Hoffman family



Fig. 1: William Beebe, far right, and Harry Hoffman, third from right, with Beebe's expedition party to the Galápagos Islands, 1923. Lyme Historical Society Archives, Florence Griswold Museum

Fig. 2: Mark Dion with Dana Sherwood, *Portrait of Mark Dion after William Beebe*, 2005. Cyanotype, 16 x 12 in. Courtesy of the artists



Selection of Archival Material, Jack Hoffman Papers, Lyme Historical Society Archives, Florence Griswold Museum

Dion feels most inspired to "make work in relationship to place." Following his first visit to the Florence Griswold Museum where he examined Willard Metcalf's *Naturalist Cabinet* (ca. 1888–1925), he proposed creating this cabinet of debris. Equal parts performance, documentation, and environmental clean-up, Dion and his assistants traversed the New England coast to gather rubbish washed up on the shores. (Fig. X) The refuse was cleaned and categorized like cherished relics. The display references the 16th- and 17th-century European *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of wonder, which housed exotic objects. The artist's modern cabinet echoes the historical tradition of presenting objects according to aesthetic similarities. Dion explains that many of these castoffs are attractive because they were originally designed to appeal to consumers. The bleached and mangled condition of these pollutants generates endless questions about their origins: Where did they come from? How long were they lost? Who did this debris belong to, or, could it have been mine? While these once-new plastics can symbolize a capitalist domination over nature by their artificiality, their patina now suggests nature's response. What does our treatment of the environment reveal about what our culture values?

Knowing Dion's deep interest in history and archeology, the Museum shared with him remnants collected during excavations that recovered Lyme Art Colony artifacts (1989, 1998-99), as well as marine debris that continues to emerge from the Lieutenant River. The resulting cabinet displays discarded objects of New England's past and present in order to encourage contemplation of what types of "curiosities" we're leaving for future generations, and what legacies.



Fig. 1: Assistants Julie Weaver and Adi Dahlke collecting debris with curator Jenny Parsons for Mark Dion's cabinet along the Fenwick, Connecticut coast of Long Island Sound, April 2019

Fig. 2: Weaver and Dahlke organizing debris on installation day, Florence Griswold Museum

Pl. 1, Fig. 1: Mark Dion, *New England Cabinet of Marine Debris* (Lyme Art Colony), 2019. Wood, metal, plastic and found debris, Lyme Art Colony artifacts, 85 x 48 in. Florence Griswold Museum, Purchase



JENNIFER ANGUS

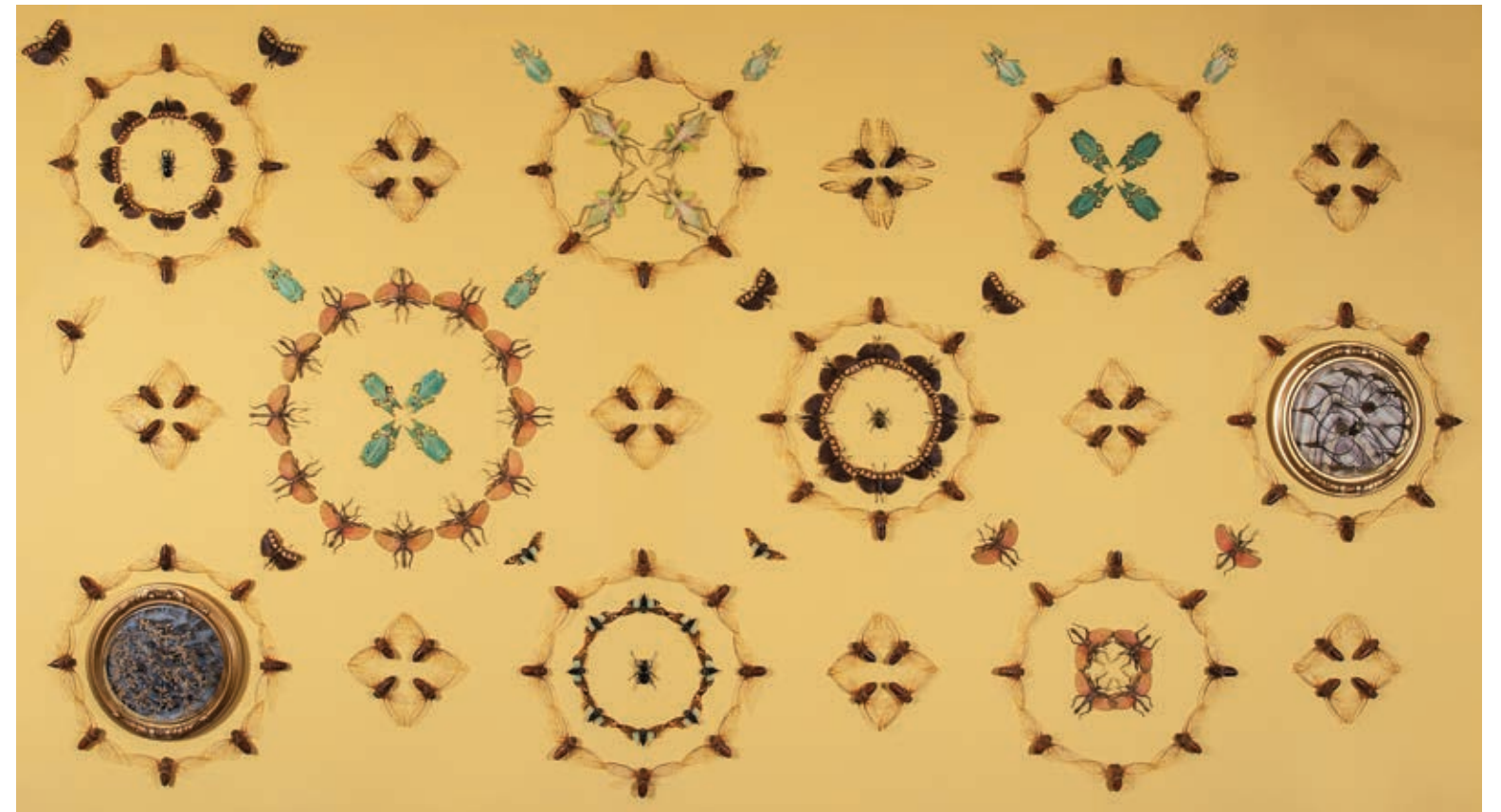
In characterizing her artistic practice, Jennifer Angus acknowledges, "my first love is pattern," adding that for someone who loves pattern, "there is no such thing as too much pattern."⁸ This passion and specialty is reflected on the walls of the Griswold House hallway, where Angus installed her *Insect Wallpaper*. Rings of Malaysian moving-leaf insects hang beside nine-inch thorny stick insects (the females are green and the males sport pink wings). Nearby are clear-wing cicadas (also from Malaysia) as well as a blue-winged variety of cicadas from Thailand. She first began using insects to form patterns in 2002, in a storefront gallery in the West Queen Street area of Toronto. Angus remembers passersby pausing to peer into the windows and exclaim, "I see the wallpaper but where is the art?" These encounters inspired her descriptive term for the work. She watched unsuspecting visitors enter the gallery, step close to the wall, and then (surprise!) quickly take a step back.

There is a tension in Angus's work, between the beauty and order of her pattern, and our culturally ingrained feeling of fear and anxiety toward insects. Insects, she explains, are usually the last thing we want to encounter in our homes. Taking them out of their natural, outdoor environment, Angus places these creatures in a domestic context where such species are prohibited, and where humans often take extreme measures to keep them out, by spraying pesticides or chasing them with fly swatters. However, for Angus and those exposed to her art, insects become ornament. As E.H. Gombrich has observed in his classic study on the psychology of decorative art, "it is the contrast between disorder and order that alerts our perception," and creates a sense of wonder.⁹ Part of humans' fear of insects is their invasion of our space, when they swarm around our heads or attempt to make a home in our home. Here Angus presents them in a manner in which they occupy our space but in a controlled and unthreatening way. Pinning them to the wall in an ordered, aesthetically pleasing design, the artist hopes viewers will be amazed, emotionally moved, and receptive to altering their perception of the insect world.



PL. 1. Florence Griswold House. Photograph by Joe Standart

Jennifer Angus, *Insect Wallpaper* in the hallway of Florence Griswold House, 2019, Pattern of insect specimens including cicadas, grasshoppers, and leaf mimic insects on gatorboard, 80 x 509 in.



8 Jennifer Angus, conversation with the author, March 2019.

9 E.H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), 6.



Jennifer Angus's work in the Parlor of Florence Griswold House



Jennifer Angus's work in the Artist's Bedroom of Florence Griswold House

Hand embroidered with green beetle wings that gleam like metal, the costume created by Jennifer Angus for Miss Florence utilizes the very material that first inspired her to begin working with insects. While conducting research in the 1980s on garments made by indigenous peoples in Thailand, Angus encountered the Karen tribe's technique of sewing beetle wings into designs on textiles. It was not only the material that moved her, but also the method. The way the Karen women weave designs into their garments can communicate meaning. Certain colors and patterns alert other members in the tribe as to whether they are married, or might incorporate lore from their shared history. Finding their use of "nature's sequins" highly inspirational, Angus decided to use the beauty of actual insect specimens in her art. She placed them into ordered patterns reminiscent of textiles or wallpaper. Like the Karen's weavings, Angus's designs come with a purpose: to change the way audiences perceive insects. Achieving that goal would begin with the lure of beauty—the glorious colors and textures made by nature itself. (Angus never paints or alters the insects in her patterns.) Her insect designs are a celebration of nature's form and of some species' aesthetic, jewel-like quality. The artist was further inspired by the tradition of sewing beetle wings into historical stage costumes, as in legendary actress Ellen Terry's garment worn while playing Lady Macbeth beginning in 1888.

In addition to Angus's meticulously sewn beetle wings, the costume embodies Miss Florence's true fondness for nature in the form of the custom-designed, hand-dyed florets, which reference both her old-fashioned garden, and the floral wallpaper on the walls of her bedroom. A metal tiara embellished with bees, though not real ones, rests on her bed. With that addition, Angus symbolically connects Florence Griswold's status as matriarch of the Art Colony to colonies in the insect world, writing: "...she presided over the festivities like the queen she was of our colony—a group of industrious artists rather than ants or bees! Like moths to the flame, every guest came forward to greet her, marveling at her costume as they admired mother nature's sequins, aptly named jewel beetles." (See p. 62)

While the artist had long wanted to create a costume using beetle wings, and had acquired several pounds of them for such an opportunity, she was surprised by her psychological response to working with them. Not only was the work laborious, but Angus came to feel depressed while sewing. She concluded that her response was connected to her deep respect for insects. Angus explained that each set of disembodied wings represented an insect that had been disassembled for consumer use, which felt wrong and not in keeping with her values—to inspire appreciation and preservation of insects. Using whole insect specimens, as she normally does, allows the creature to retain its integrity. She doubts she will use wings alone in this way again.

Jennifer Angus, *Miss Florence's Costume*, 2019. 56 in. tall, Velvet cape hand-embroidered with iridescent green beetle wings







Jennifer Angus, *Cabinet of Curiosities*, 2019. Wooden hardware cabinet, glass, insect specimens, mixed media, 63 ¼ x 64 ½ x 12 in.



Cabinets of curiosity served as the initial motivation for the *Fragile Earth* concept, when curator Jenny Parsons encountered one of Angus's cabinets in an exhibition at the Renwick Gallery, Washington, D.C., and immediately recalled Impressionist Willard Metcalf's historic version in Old Lyme. During Angus's residency at the Florence Griswold Museum, she dedicated the majority of her time to transforming 104 drawers of an old hardware cabinet into a new cabinet of curiosity. It serves in part as a response to Metcalf's cabinet in the Museum's collection. Additionally, Angus's fictional narrative incorporates the cabinet as something assembled by the Lyme artists and guests as amusing party décor. Each of the drawers tell a unique story, which unite around several environmental themes.

Many drawers contain anthropomorphized insects who act out narratives for viewers to interpret. In relation to the exhibition's theme, certain insects study natural history. They read natural history books, peer into specimen cases, or stand surrounded by miniature bell jars. (Fig. [below]) On the sides of one drawer are pasted antique seed packets, perhaps like ones in the Museum's archives that Miss Florence ordered for her garden. One of the recurring characters in Angus's work who perform this task are her "cicada ladies." These matrons are made with the head of a cicada, the arms of a grasshopper, and a dress cast from beeswax. Angus explains that her cicada ladies, which appear throughout her Griswold House display, hold a kind of power over their worlds, where they are always in charge and are usually engaged in learning or teaching. In some ways they evoke the personality of Professor Angus herself, metamorphized into the guise of insect matriarch, not unlike the strong female presence of Florence Griswold, who played host to the artists' Colony.

Other drawers allude to the degradation of the environment by human actions. In one vignette a stag beetle examines an antique pesticide sprayer, along with a can of "Red Wing Insect Powder," upon which the label reads, "Destroys Flies." (Fig.) Underneath the sprayer a makeshift grave contains the bodies of the beetle's friends who have sadly succumbed to the poison. Beside them a ghostly plant matter (wild cucumber) has a skeleton-like, memento mori quality, alluding to the preciousness of life and the impending threat of death. Some drawers feature insects travelling through forests of burned matches or candles, which represent deforestation by scorching, as well as the planet's slow incineration caused by global warming. (Fig.) Angus extends that symbolism by placing miniature burned books throughout the drawers. (Fig.) In one sense they recall historical instances of book-burning used to suppress knowledge or dissent. In Angus's cabinet the books are symbols of knowledge that have been ignored and thus continue to burn up. The artist describes how many people understand the environmental crisis, but they remain in denial of the reports and put their heads in the sand. Overwhelming evidence supports the fact that climate change is real and human actions largely contribute to these changes, but the public often turns a blind eye. The matches placed near the burned books also symbolize the fossil fuels that cause our atmosphere and oceans waters to warm, generating an enormous threat to this planet.

Angus's insect narratives seek to alter public opinion about insects and alert audiences to the fact that life will need to adapt to future conditions without them. To combat an insect apocalypse, the artist advocates for preservation, mindfulness of consumption, and actions which honor all life on Earth, including insects.





Mantel designs by James Prosek in the Artist's Bedroom
 Mantel designs by Courtney Mattison in Florence Griswold's Bedroom



Mantel designs by Mark Dion in the Orientation Room
 Mantel designs by Jennifer Angus in the Parlor

BIOGRAPHIES

Jennifer Angus

Born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (1961). Jennifer Angus attended the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, and received a BFA from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax. She earned an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1991). Since 2001 Angus has been a Professor in the Design Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, as well as an Affiliate Faculty member in the Art Department. She travels the world mentoring students and gathering inspiration for her ecologically safe installations of preserved insects, which bring attention to the creatures' role in the environment, their habitats, and the human role in deforestation, agriculture, and urbanization. In 2013 she authored the novel *In Search of Goliathus Hercules* (Albert Whitman & Co.). Angus has received annual grants from the University of Wisconsin Graduate School, as well as a Vilas Associate Award, the Emily Mead Baldwin-Bascom Professorship in the Creative Arts, and most recently a Kellett Fellowship. She has exhibited at such venues as the Renwick Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution, MadArt Seattle, the Museum of Art and Design, the Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum, and the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. Internationally her work has been seen in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, and Spain. Her exhibition, "A Terrible Beauty," at the Textile Museum of Canada was selected as "Exhibition of the Year" by the Ontario Association of Art Galleries in 2006.

Mark Dion

Born in New Bedford, Massachusetts (1961). Mark Dion initially studied at the Hartford Art School of the University of Hartford, CT (1981-2), which awarded him a BFA (1986) and honorary doctorate (2002). He attended the School of Visual Arts, NY (1983-4) and then the prestigious Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program (1984-5). He is an Honorary Fellow of Falmouth University in the UK, and holds an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters (PhD) from The Wagner Free Institute of Science in Philadelphia. Dion's practice examines the ways in which dominant ideologies and public institutions shape our understanding of history, knowledge, and the natural world. He is co-director of Mildred's Lane, an innovative visual art education and residency program in Beach Lake, PA. The artist has received numerous awards, including the ninth annual Larry Aldrich Foundation Award, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Lucida Art Award, and was a Guggenheim Fellowship recipient in 2019. He has had major exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Whitechapel Gallery; Storm King Art Center; Miami Art Museum; Museum of Modern Art; Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art; Tate Gallery; and the British Museum of Natural History. For over two decades Dion has worked in the public realm in a wide range of scales. Some of his large-scale public projects include permanent installations for Olympic Sculpture Park, Seattle Art Museum; the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco; the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Paris (with Sarina Basta); Documenta 13 in Kassel, Germany; the Montevideo Biennial in Uruguay; the Rose Art

Museum; Johns Hopkins University; the city of Stavoren, Holland; and the Port of Los Angeles. A prolific author, Dion often produces "field guides" in conjunction with his unique projects, and regularly contributes to exhibition catalogue and books. He lives with his wife and frequent collaborator Dana Sherwood in Copake, NY and works worldwide.

Courtney Mattison

Born in San Francisco, California (1985). Courtney Mattison received an interdisciplinary BA in marine ecology and ceramic sculpture from Skidmore College and a MA in environmental studies from Brown University, with coursework at the Rhode Island School of Design. She took classes in marine biology and sculpture simultaneously, and found that the most productive means for her understanding of marine creatures' anatomy was to sculpt them. In her dual role as artist and ocean advocate, Mattison handcrafts intricate and large-scale ceramic sculptural works inspired by the beauty of marine ecosystems, particularly coral reefs, and the human-caused threats they face. Based in Los Angeles, she has received commissions for installations from the U.S. Department of State's Office of Art in Embassies, the Nova Southeastern University Oceanographic Center, the Coral Triangle Center, Bali, Indonesia, and private patrons. Since 2014 she has worked with Mission Blue, an ocean advocacy organization in affiliation with the Sylvia Earle Alliance, and has traveled on Hope Spot Expeditions to Mexico, Spain's Balearic Islands, and the Norwegian Arctic. She has conducted additional fieldwork in Australia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the British Virgin Islands. Mattison's sculpture has been exhibited at prominent venues including the U.S. Department of Commerce & National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) headquarters, the Whatcom Museum, the American Museum of Ceramic Art, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) headquarters, and the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art. Her work has been featured by international outlets including *Smithsonian Magazine*, "Good Morning America;" *O, The Oprah Magazine*; *British Vogue*, CNN Indonesia, BBC World Service, and the scientific journal *Science*.

James Prosek

Born in Easton, Connecticut (1975). An artist, writer, and naturalist, James Prosek studied at Yale University (BA 1997) and is the author of more than thirteen books on art and nature. His practice revises historical methods to creatively reimagine documentary imagery of American flora and fauna, commenting on the interconnectedness of our ecosystem. Prosek has written for *The New York Times* and *National Geographic Magazine*. His book *Eels: An Exploration, from New Zealand to the Sargasso, of the World's Most Amazing and Mysterious Fish* (2010) was a New York Times Book Review editor's choice, and was the subject of a documentary for the PBS series "Nature" (2013). He has held numerous artist residencies, including at the Yale University Art Gallery, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and the Addison Gallery of American Art. His awards include

a Gold Medal for Distinction in Natural History Art from the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and a George Foster Peabody Award for his documentary film, *The Compleat Angler*. Prosek has exhibited at such venues as the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Yale Center for British Art, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, with solo exhibitions at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the New Britain Museum of American Art, the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, the North Carolina Museum of Art, the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami, Wave Hill, and the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C., among others. He co-founded a conservation initiative called World Trout (2004) with Yvon Chouinard, the owner of Patagonia clothing company. Prosek is a curatorial affiliate, as well as on the board (Leadership Council), of the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale, and a member of the advisory board of the Yale Institute for Biospheric Studies.

Jane Lubchenco

Born in Denver, Colorado (1947). the Honorable Jane Lubchenco, PhD, University Distinguished Professor at Oregon State University, is a marine ecologist with expertise in the ocean, climate change, and interactions between the environment and human well-being. She served as the U.S. Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and an inaugural member of President Barack Obama's Science Team from 2009-2013. From 2014-2016, she was the first U.S. State Department Science Envoy for the Ocean, serving as a science diplomat to China, Indonesia, South Africa, Mauritius and the Seychelles. In recognition of her scientific contributions, she is an elected member of the National Academy of Sciences, The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, The American Philosophical Society, the Royal Society, The World Academy of Science, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and other distinguished academies. She has received numerous awards including 23 honorary doctorates and the highest honors given by the National Academy of Sciences and the National Science Foundation. She co-founded three organizations that train scientists to be better communicators and engage more effectively with the public, policy makers, media and industry. She co-founded an integrated research/monitoring/outreach program (PISCO, the Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans), the National Ocean Protection Coalition, and the MPA Project which seeks to advance smart use of Marine Protected Areas. Dr. Lubchenco received a BA in biology from Colorado College, a MS in zoology from the University of Washington, and a PhD in ecology from Harvard University. Her professorial career began at Harvard University (1975-1977) and continued at Oregon State University (1977-2009). Following her resignation from NOAA, she was the 2013 Haas Distinguished Visitor in Public Service at Stanford University before returning to Oregon State University as the University Distinguished Professor.

Jennifer Stettler Parsons

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1983). Jenny Parsons is Assistant Curator at the Florence Griswold Museum. A specialist in American and modern art, she earned a PhD in Art & Architectural History from the University of Virginia, where her dissertation explored themes of regional identity in the early work of John Sloan. During her doctoral candidacy she won the Archives of American Art Graduate Research Essay Prize for her scholarship on Arthur Dove. She holds an MA in Art History and Museum Studies from George Washington University, and BA in Art History from the University of Delaware. Parsons joined the Florence Griswold Museum in 2016, where her exhibitions have included *Flora/Fauna: The Naturalist Impulse in American Art* (Exh. Cat., 2017), and *Paper Trail: American Prints, Drawings, and Watercolors*. Previously, Parsons was the Sara Roby Predoctoral Fellow in Twentieth-Century American Realism at the Smithsonian American Art Museum (2014-16), and the Barra Foundation Fellow in American Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (2013-14). She has held additional internships and professional positions at the Delaware Art Museum, The Phillips Collection, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

CHECKLIST FOR KRIEBLE GALLERIES

James Prosek <i>Plants from field</i> , 2018 Watercolor study 22 x 9 ½ inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York	James Prosek <i>Burned Log with Clay Flowers</i> , 2016/2019 Bronze, clay, oil paint 9 ½ x 21 x 9 Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York	James Prosek <i>Tree Emoji (Myth of Order VI)</i> , 2019 Birch branches, clay, acrylic paint 13 x 12 ½ x 3 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York
James Prosek <i>Plants from pond</i> , 2018 Watercolor study 22 x 9 ½ inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York	James Prosek <i>Burned Bowl with Lemon Egg</i> , 2016 Bronze, oil paint 10 x 6 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York	James Prosek <i>Myth of Order V</i> , 2015 Birch branches, clay, acrylic paint 15 x 15 x 6 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York
James Prosek <i>Old Lyme Specimens, Winter</i> , 2019 Watercolor study 16 x 7 ¾ inches Florence Griswold Museum, Purchase	James Prosek <i>Old Lyme by Land and Sea</i> Acrylic paint on sheet rock 240 x 360 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York	James Prosek <i>Flying Squirrels</i> , 2013 Taxidermy squirrels, quail and duck wings, clay flowers, moss and wood 26 x 17 x 14 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York
James Prosek <i>Pond no. 1</i> , 2018 Watercolor and acrylic on panel 12 x 15 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York	James Prosek <i>Striped Bass</i> , 2017 Oil and acrylic on panel 33 ¾ x 42 inches Florence Griswold Museum, Purchase	James Prosek <i>Avian Composition with Warblers</i> , 2018 Acrylic on panel 46 x 46 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York
James Prosek <i>Pond no. 2</i> , 2018 Watercolor and acrylic on panel 15 x 12 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York	James Prosek <i>Black Sea Bass</i> , 2011 Watercolor, gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on tea-stained paper 25 x 32 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York	James Prosek <i>Moth Cluster IV</i> , 2016 Pen, ink, and silkscreen on paper 60 x 130 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York
James Prosek <i>Abstract Nature</i> , 2009 Eel stamped with sumi ink on paper 96 x 120 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York	James Prosek <i>Myth of Order III</i> , 2014 Birch branches, clay, acrylic paint 14 x 18 x 3 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York	Courtney Mattison <i>Afterglow (Our Changing Seas VI)</i> , 2018 Glazed stoneware and porcelain 90 ½ x 102 x 19 ½ inches Courtesy of the artist
James Prosek Hand-forged iron eel spears, 2019 80 x 107 inches Courtesy of the artist and Waqas Wajahat, New York		

Hope Spots:

Courtney Mattison <i>Coral Sea II</i> , 2015 Glazed stoneware and porcelain 17 x 16 ½ x 11 inches Courtesy of the artist
Courtney Mattison <i>Coral Triangle II</i> , 2015 Glazed stoneware and porcelain 19 x 17 x 9 inches Courtesy of the artist
Courtney Mattison <i>Micronesia Islands II</i> , 2015 Glazed stoneware and porcelain 17 x 17 x 12 ½ inches Courtesy of the artist
Courtney Mattison <i>Sargasso Sea II</i> , 2015 Glazed stoneware and porcelain 18 x 18 x 6 inches Courtesy of the artist
Courtney Mattison <i>Malum Geminis</i> , 2019 Glazed stoneware and porcelain 84 x 250 x 22 inches Courtesy of the artist
Courtney Mattison <i>Texture Study I</i> , 2019 Glazed stoneware 59 x 59 x 22 inches Courtesy of the artist

Mark Dion <i>Scala Natura</i> , 2008 Offset color lithography 50 ½ x 40 inches Edition of 40, IAP Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles	Mark Dion <i>New England Cabinet of Marine Debris (Lyme Art Colony)</i> , 2019 Wood, metal, plastic and found debris, Lyme Art Colony artifacts 85 x 48 inches Florence Griswold Museum, Purchase	Willard L. Metcalf (1858–1925) <i>Naturalist Collection Chest</i> , ca. 1885–1925 Mahogany wood containing a collection of butterflies, moths, bird eggs, nests and supporting documents 64 ½ x 42 ¼ x 14 ¼ in. Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Mrs. Henriette A. Metcal
Mark Dion <i>Apparatus</i> , 2018 Portfolio book containing 20 drawings and packet of insect pins 7 ¼ x 7 ¼ x ¾ inches (portfolio) 5 7/8 x 5 7/8 inches (each drawing) Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles	Mark Dion <i>Bone Coral</i> , 2018 Resin and assorted objects 56 ½ x 12 ¾ x 12 ½ inches Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles	fHarry L. Hoffman (1871–1964) <i>Man-o'-War Birds, Isabela Island</i> , ca. 1923 Oil on canvas 24 x 26 inches Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of David and Suzanne Hoffman and the Hoffman family
Mark Dion <i>World in a Box</i> , 2015 Set of 27 prints; lithography, cyanotype, digital, screenprint, etching, letterpress and woodcut in a custom-made oak wood storage box with etching / letterpress cover image (on lid) and lithograph inventory list (inside lid) 13 ⅛ x 10 ⅜ x 1 5/8 inches Edition of 20, 8 APs Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles	Mark Dion <i>Hunting Standards (Felt)</i> , 2012 Set of 4 silkscreen prints on colored felt 16 x 20 inches Edition of 20 with 12 APs	Harry L. Hoffman (1871–1964) <i>Amblyrhynchus, Marine Iguana, Galapagos</i> , ca. 1923 Oil on canvas 24 x 26 inches Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of David and Suzanne Hoffman and the Hoffman family
Mark Dion <i>Travels of William Bartram Reconsidered (equipment)</i> , 2008 Tarp, hand nets, wood cases, leaf presses, hand tools, nature books, and maps 17 x 90 ½ x 65 inches Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles	Mark Dion <i>Fragments of Travel, Exploration and Adventure</i> , 2007 Artist book 12 ¾ x 10 ¾ x 1 inches Edition of 36; 9 APs Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles	Mark Dion <i>Nature Morte</i> , 2018 Ceramic penguin, tar, metal bucket, various dime store trinkets and costume jewelry 38 ¾ x 10 7/8 x 10 ¾ inches Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles
	Selection of Archival Material Jack Hoffman Papers, Lyme Historical Society Archives Florence Griswold Museum	Mark Dion <i>300 Million Years of Flight</i> , 2012 Silkscreen on paper 32 x 26 inches Edition of 30 Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition and publication had its genesis in the Lyme Art Colony's history and subsequent museum collection, but the finished product is the result of a close collaboration with four remarkable contemporary artists, and the support of many colleagues who helped it come to fruition. I wish to extend my enormous, heartfelt gratitude to Jennifer Angus, Mark Dion, Courtney Mattison, and James Prosek, who through their insightful artwork, writings, and many conversations and correspondence, were instrumental in helping to shape the exhibition's thesis. Each artist generously devoted extensive time to the project, learned about our Museum's historic narrative and landscape through site visits and literature, and suggested appropriate existing works and new, site-specific pieces that would contribute to the display and environmental conversation. For the meaningful texts they wrote for this book, I thank the artists as well as esteemed scientist Jane Lubchenco (with assistant Emily Boring)—their thoughtful contributions will serve as a lasting resource for scholars and enthusiasts.

I am incredibly grateful for the support of my mentors and colleagues at the Florence Griswold Museum, who welcomed the project's many "firsts," including its challenging content, long installation schedule, and the unprecedented intervention inside the historic house by our inaugural Artist-in-Residence. The planning of the exhibition spanned the terms of two brilliantly supportive directors: Many thanks are due to Director Emeritus Jeffrey Andersen for his enthusiastic endorsement of the project prior to his retirement. I greatly appreciate and thank Director Rebekah Beaulieu for fearlessly embracing the complexities of *Fragile Earth* upon taking the helm in February 2018, and leading the Museum to forge new paths. At every level, Curator Amy Kurtz Lansing provided crucial guidance and encouragement—I am especially grateful to Amy for lending her intellectual feedback and editorial skills to the exhibition texts and this manuscript. Additional staff members afforded invaluable assistance during the planning and implementation of this exhibition. Registrar Mell Scalzi should be commended for ably managing the complicated logistics of shipping and installation schedules, and lending her skillful assistance in an incalculable number of miscellaneous tasks. For their expertise in translating the exhibition's concepts into engaging educational programming, I am grateful to Director of Education and Outreach David D.J. Rau as well as Manager of Youth Education and Outreach Julie Garvin Riggs. Exhibition Team members Tammi Flynn, Ted Gaffney, Janie Stanley, Matt Strekel, Matthew Marshall, Fred Cote, DeeDee Filiatreault, Cheryl Poirier, and Randy Robinson importantly contributed to bringing this exhibition to life. The talents of Nathaniel Greene, Therese Kus, Melissa Díaz, Joan Greene, Emily Clark, Amber Pero, Linda Turner, and Shelby

Chadwick have ensured the success of the show's daily operations; and Sam Stark provided media assistance for marketing and education. I'm grateful for the contributions of exhibition intern Adi Dahlke for acting as a curatorial chameleon—Adi assisted with tasks ranging from debris collection, mural painting, insect preparation, and catalogue editing. Intern Isabelle MacDonald also provided significant curatorial support. I thank our amazing cohort of docents and educators for their enthusiasm and dedication to learning about a very different (!) installation inside the historic boardinghouse.

Tremendous thanks are owed to Jenny Chan and her team at Jack Design, for her creative direction, wonderful exhibition graphics, and for producing this beautiful book. Paul Mutino skillfully captured the show's immersive quality through his incredible photography. Richard Denzer at Puritan Capital made the manuscript into a reality—thank you.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance and kindness of these additional colleagues and friends who made this exhibition and publication possible, including Tanya Bonakdar, Adi Puterman, Brandy Carstens, Myungwon Kim, and Karen Polack at the Tanya Bonakdar Gallery; Waqas Wajahat, Dana Sherwood, Julie Weaver, Gloriann Langva, Sue Aberbach, Nick Pfaff, Kieran Morris, Gordon Spencer-Blaetz, Matthew Hargraves, Amy Meyers, Courtney Long, Robert McCracken Peck, Ellery Foutch, Sarah Montross, David and Suzanne Hoffman, Tom Hoffman; Laura Vookles, Alyssa Drelisak, Ted Barrow, and Jason Weller at the Hudson River Museum; Donald Sigovich, Julie Aronson, and Cindy Kent.

Rebekah Beaulieu joins me in extending our supreme gratitude to the Museum's Board of Trustees and President David W. Dangremond, and for our exhibition sponsors, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Department of Economic and Community Development, the Connecticut Office of the Arts, Bank of America, the Nika P. Thayer Exhibition and Publication Fund, Mr. & Mrs. Maxwell M. Belding, Mr. Charles T. Clark, The Howard Gilman Foundation, The Vincent Dowling Family Foundation, Mr. & Mrs. J. Geddes Parsons, Mr. William Blunt White, as well as donors to the Museum's Annual Fund, and media sponsors WSHU Public Radio and *Connecticut Cottages & Gardens*. We also thank Jeff and Betsey Cooley for their generosity.

To all who have inspired this project through their love of art, history, and nature, and for those who will be motivated to help protect our fragile Earth, I am truly grateful.

Jennifer Stettler Parsons, Ph.D.
Associate Curator