



# Hospital plays host to art's healing power

Gilbert Bouchard



## PREVIEW

Transformations: Waves of Fire, Clouds of Snow

Showing at: McMullen Gallery, main floor, University of Alberta Hospital (8440 112th St.)  
Until: Feb. 6

Fine arts meets the healing arts in the exhibit Transformations: Waves of Fire, Clouds of Snow at the University of Alberta Hospital's McMullen Gallery.

In this cutting-edge multimedia exhibition, sound designer and producer Ryan Dorward has seamlessly merged video and computer-altered still images by visual artist Agnieszka Matejko with the compositions of musician Adrienne Arlen Duffy into a high-tech interactive show.

Based on Matejko images of accessible natural subject matters such as clouds, water, ice and fire, much of the show consists of 28 large (91-by-152-centimetre) transparent images hung from the ceiling or applied to mirrors on the gallery's walls. They are, in turn, ani-

mated by randomly selected snippets of Duffy's compositions set off by motion sensors. The exhibit also includes drumming tables, sound/video "music" boxes and two touch-driven sound tables.

The exhibit is "not just a visual arts show," says Matejko, but was specifically designed to be a meditative and transformative resource for hospital patients, staff and families.

"You might say we were compelled to create a transformational atmosphere in the hospital setting, asking ourselves what people would need finding themselves in such a traumatic situation," says Duffy.

"The idea was to create a place of calm

and peacefulness that serves as a break from the highly technical environment of the hospital where we give people sound and visuals to take them to another level."

Matejko says she usually works with images that have a more industrial feel than the abstracted natural images found in the McMullen show.

"It was important to me to find natural and familiar images that had a warm and sensual feel, that also avoided the typical sunset and trees you see in a lot of landscapes," she says. "All the images are everyday and very simple," like a big storm hitting a lake in a city park, a big bonfire out on a farm or portraits of

the sandhills of southern Saskatchewan. "These are all things we've seen many times before, but we're trying to turn them into little paradigm-breaking moments."

Duffy says the theme of transformation was carried through in the series of images themselves: a row of fire portraits are manipulated so that they morph into water images, while the undulations of the sandhills are manipulated so that they look like waves of water, much in the same way "the stress of a hospital stay can also transform itself into peace if it means someone connects with their family or gives them a greater appreciation for life and people around them."

"This work is also kind of similar to Renaissance art in its transformative manner and its beauty. ... When we were making this work, we pretended that we had been commissioned by the people here in the hospital," says Matejko, pleased with the warm feedback the artists have received so far.

Accessibility was important for all three artists, which is what led to the experiments in interactive technologies. "It's meant to be accessible at different levels," says Matejko.

"Imagine this as a form a poetry written for the people of the hospital with the intention of touching them in a meaningful way."



RICK MACWILLIAM, THE JOURNAL

Adrienne Arlen Duffy, left, Ryan Dorward and Agnieszka Matejko with their joint multimedia exhibition, Transformations: Waves of Fire, Clouds of Snow

# City entomologist downright buggy about insect drawings

For most Edmontonians, insects are not the first thing we think of when we're looking for a tangible example of sublime beauty.

If anything, the sight of a huge wasp alighting next to us on the patio or the late-night sound of a six-legged creature scuttling across the kitchen floor is more likely to get us reaching for a fly swatter or fumbling for the number of a good exterminator than reaching for a digital camera or sketch pad.

Not so for George Ball.

With more than 50 years of global insect prospecting under his belt — mainly focusing on ground beetles — the University of Alberta professor emeritus of entomology is a tireless advocate for both the ethereal beauty of insects as well as the role of entomology in the study of the natural world.

A major contributor and honorary curator of the school's one-million-specimen E. H. Strickland Entomological Museum, Ball has also mounted a focused exhibit of spectacularly beautifully illustrated antiquarian books on entomology at the university's Bruce Peel Special Collections.

The Art of Insect Illustration and Threads of Entomological History features 30 volumes of iconographic entomological value dating back to the early 14th century, as well as actual mounted insects from the U of A's collection and a handful of antique scientific implements used by early entomologists.

"These are all prize books and represent our major holdings in early entomological literature, mainly encompassing the beginning of the science in the early 1600s to works from the 1930s," he says. "This is a very good picture of the evolution of biological illustrators."

"You can see from surveying these books that the artform took off quickly. By the early 17th century, you have some wildly beautiful drawings and the art of engravings had reached a very high level."

"One book from 1764 has a very high-detailed and very accurate representation of the veins on a dragonfly wing. Other images are also very well com-

## PREVIEW

The Art of Insect Illustration and Threads of Entomological History

Showing at: Bruce Peel Special Collections, Rutherford South Library, University of Alberta  
Until: March 31 (gallery hours, Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed for the holidays noon Dec. 24 until Jan. 3)

posed and show the whole life cycle of the insect, as well as a part of its natural environment."

Ball would like visitors to the show to contemplate all the effort that went into the creation of the illustrated books in the collection.

"There's a whole appendix in Katherine Govier's novel *Creation* (a novel about the work of John James Audubon) about how engravings were done" in the early 19th century, Ball says. "These were huge plates that were being produced and it was a very complicated project."

The colour illustrations in many of the early tomes were equally time-consuming to produce with dozens of colourists being engaged to hand-paint the images. "They were paid a pittance but still had to get all the colours right."

What's most amazing about the work represented in the show is how most of it was created by talented amateurs who made their living in other professions outside science and art and produced these highly time-consuming works in their spare time.

One fictional example of this is the movie and book *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* where the military ship's surgeon (Dr. Stephen Maturin) was a prolific and energetic amateur naturalist.

"Much of this work represents that scientific explosion following on the heels of colonial explorations. In those days most ships would carry naturalists."

Gilbert A. Bouchard



CHRIS SCHWARZ, THE JOURNAL

George Ball shows how insects have been documented and illustrated through the centuries.

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