

Silver-Coated Insects: Concept and Perception

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Figure 3: Exhibition of the insects atop projection pedestals

Introduction

I am interested in expressing the transition between an organism's life and death. I felt that the medium of metal was appropriate for representing the permanence of death while the organic carcass of the insect represented the impermanence of life. Previously, I had cast honey bees in fine silver and found that a great amount of detail was lost by this method. Looking to maintain detail, I turned to the process of sputter coating. This process, used for electron-microscopy, provides a thin metallic finish yet preserves the fine detail of the specimen. In addition to exploration of a new technical process, I was interested in whether or not viewers were understanding my concept. To determine this I incorporated a survey into the exhibition of the insects. The survey showed that many viewers understood the idea I was aiming to convey.

Methods

Insects obtained from UWW Biology Dept. were partially coated with platinum metal (Fig. 1a & 1b) using a sputter coater machine (Fig. 2). PVC pipes (3 in.) were cut to 4 ft. lengths, painted primer gray and capped at one end with clear Plexiglas circles for insect mounting. Interior pipes (1.5 in.) were used to support battery powered LED arrays ca. 12 in. under the Plexiglas to provide lighting from below.

The art was displayed in an exhibition at a local gallery (Fig.3). The pipes were set up vertically and placed to look like a random distribution. The room was darkened and shadows were projected on a 10 ft. ceiling (Fig.4). At the end of the display viewers were allowed to complete a survey: "Describe what you think the concept is behind this exhibit."



Figure 1a: Insects before sputter coating



Figure 1b: Insects after sputter coating



Figure 2: Sputter coater machine used to coat insects in metal prior to viewing through electron microscopes

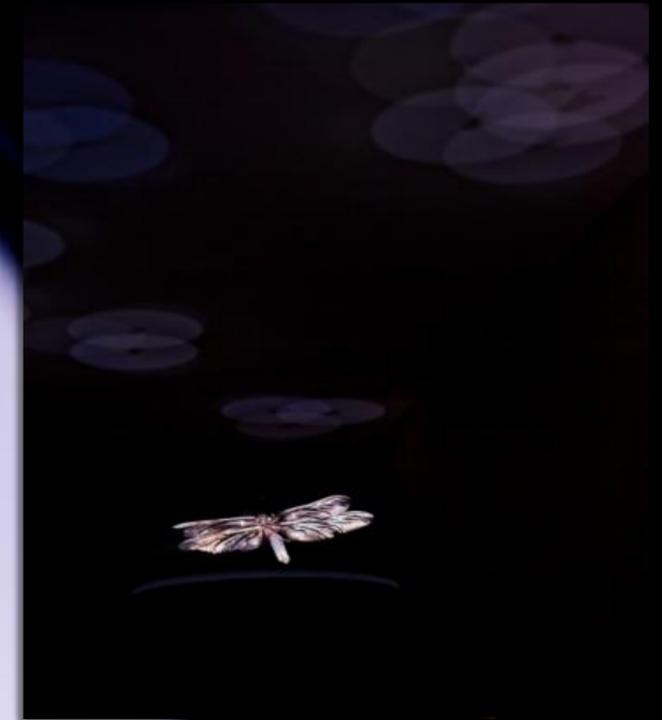


Figure 4: Metal coated insect with shadows projected onto the ceiling

Discussion

Following the exhibition, the survey responses were compared with the original intended concept. Nearly fifty percent coincided with my artist statement for the piece, which was not posted during the exhibit. Though the other responses did not correlate with the original idea, they did offer fresh viewpoints on the work. For example, one response noted the relation of the mechanical aspects of natural insects to the metal finish of those exhibited- not exactly the intended concept but still a note well worth pondering.

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