

# **‘I always want to do something new’**

Bruce Museum exhibition, ‘The Golden Hour,’ uses taxidermy, thousands of dead insects to raise awareness about climate change and deforestation



Animals at the dinner table in "The Golden Hour" exhibit at the Bruce Museum.



"The Golden Hour" exhibit at the Bruce Museum.





Insects incased in jelly in "The Golden Hour" exhibit at the Bruce Museum.

**BY JOSEPH TUCCI**  
*STAFF WRITER*

Thousands of dead insects line the walls of three progressively darkening rooms at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich. In the last room, animals preserved through taxidermy gather around a dinner table set with candles. The museum aims to use the exhibit to send a message: time is running out.

The critters are part of one of the museum's newest exhibitions, "The Golden Hour," which is running through Sept. 8. The exhibition, which is composed of three rooms in the museum, aims to raise awareness of the dangers that climate change and deforestation pose to animals by depicting them in a new light, according to Bruce Museum Curator of Science Dr. Daniel T. Ksepka.

The exhibition's artist, Jennifer Angus, said that she tailors her exhibits to the venues she uses. For "The Golden Hour," she combined her own preserved insects with taxidermy from the Bruce Museum's own collection. She added that she acquired most of her insects from farmers and the species she uses have high populations, such as cicadas, grasshoppers and beetles. Angus said that the installation at the museum took around 13 days to complete and that she would likely never do an identical exhibit again.

"I always want to do something new with each show," Angus said.

Miniature houses on stilts tower above the floor in the exhibition's first room and represent a village, according to Angus. Collections of jars filled with insects encased in red, orange and yellow jelly are meant to symbolize the stained glass windows of a church. The religious theme continues with shoebox-sized terrariums of preserved insects in the room made to look like they are indulging in the seven deadly sins of pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth.

As guests move from one room to the next, the lighting gets dimmer and dimmer, symbolizing that time is running out to reverse the effects of climate change and deforestation. Angus said that she hopes visitors will have a sense of amazement as they make their way through the exhibition.

"I think back to childhood, where every day there was an amazing thing. So I hope that people will feel that wonder. And I certainly hope that they will leave thinking about insects differently," Angus said.

The second room is filled with dozens of terrariums with even more

preserved insects. Behind the glass, the insects are made to look like they are doing things like reading, dancing and playing games.

Thousands of preserved insects decorate the walls of each room of the exhibit. Cicada carcasses are lined up one after another, giving the appearance that they are flying. Phylliidae, which look like leaves, grasshoppers, beetles and other insects form circles around replica animal heads on the walls. Angus said that she hopes those venturing through are able to see the “beauty” of all insects. She added that she hopes guests will think about how many insects’ environments are being destroyed by deforestation and climate change.

“I specifically didn’t use moths and butterflies, because those are obviously beautiful. So the things with wings in my work are cicadas and grasshoppers, things that we might not have considered as beautiful. ... So while a tropical rainforest may seem far away, I always say to people, I can guarantee that something is endangered in your neck of the woods,” Angus said.

In the third and final room, animals preserved through taxidermy, including a raccoon, albatross, owl, otter, and multiple squirrels sit around a dinner table. The table is set with candles and models of food items like pears, cherries, apples and bread. A skeletal reptile and monkey can be seen crawling out from underneath the tablecloth. The dinner party was inspired by “There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly,” a story about the dangers of overconsumption that features a woman who dies after she consumes a fly and then several other animals. The display is also meant to represent the animals having a seat in the discussion about how to halt climate change. Other animals sit on a drawer in the room. Each day, different cabinets of the drawer are opened to reveal different displays.

“I was thinking about nature as a commodity, something that man consumes. ... I like to recontextualize these animals; I feel that they are kind of brought to life in this situation,” Angus said. “The skeletons below the table are kind of uninvited guests; they’re lurking there. They’re a kind of ghostly reminder of what we stand to lose.”

The artist said she first got the idea for the exhibit when she had COVID during a trip to northern Vietnam. While she was isolating, one of her favorite activities was to come outside during the golden hour, the last hour before sunset, and embrace her environment. While she enjoyed bathing in the light, she said that she also had a deep sense of “ecological grief,” knowing that the environment around her would be damaged or destroyed by climate change.

“The light was just so magical and often it would rain. It was even a very peculiar light. Maybe it was in my delirium, but I felt like I was in a film. There were gardens near this cabin that I was at which attracted butterflies,” Angus said.