

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS ST. PETE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Jennifer Angus Uses Insects to Redefine Beauty, Remind Audiences of Their Relevance to the Planet in New, Special Exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg

‘The Grasshopper and the Ant’ and Other Stories, as told by Jennifer Angus is the largest installation of the top contemporary artist’s career

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (October 21, 2019) — When you think of insects, art may not be the first word that comes to mind. Where many see nuisance pests and recoil, artist Jennifer Angus looks deeper and embraces their natural beauty — the rainbow colors of their giant wings and exoskeleton, the wispieness of an antenna, the jagged design of their legs. In her eyes, insects are not to be feared, but celebrated.

Angus, one of the top contemporary installation artists in the country, hopes her latest project at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg will rekindle a sense of discovery and respect for the importance and beauty of what she calls the “six-legged kingdom.” *‘The Grasshopper and the Ant’ and Other Stories, as told by Jennifer Angus*, on view through January 5, 2020, creates a wondrous environment where thousands of exotic, brilliantly-colored insects reign in the nearly 7,000-square-foot gallery space within the MFA’s Hough Wing.

For Angus, this is the biggest art installation of the Canadian artist’s 20-plus year career.

Inspired by *Aesop’s Fables* and steeped in neo-Victorian ideas and design, Angus’ elaborate and stunning “wallpaper” patterns made of dried insects are pinned into place (just as insects were traditionally collected and displayed in the 19th century),

and spans across the Hough Wing's 22-foot-tall walls. The designs entice the visitor's natural attraction to color and repetition, but upon a closer look, challenge the viewer's perception of insects and expectations of beauty. An oil painting from the MFA Collection illustrating the Greek fable, *The Grasshopper and the Ant*, serves as the starting point for the show. Quotes from various *Aesop's Fables* are printed on small Victorian receiving cards visitors can collect throughout the galleries to guide their experience. The "Cabinet of Curiosities" gallery includes vintage typewriter cases with insects illustrating the Seven Deadly Sins; endless rows of bell jars lining the walls filled with colorful insects viewing Victorian-era insect specimen slides; large cases with *memento mori* displays, alluding to the importance of insects in decomposition; and a large Victorian apothecary-type cabinet with 170 drawers containing surreal vignettes of insects performing human activities, and other surprises. Another gallery features a whimsical "animal dinner party" inspired by the tea party in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Angus, a Professor of Textiles at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, combines her medium with symbolic imagery such as skulls and clocks to speak to the global disasters happening in the environment (i.e., colony collapse of bees) and how humans play a part in the destruction.

"I seek to rehabilitate the image of insects and draw correlations between humans and members of the six-legged kingdom. The fear we have of insects is generally unwarranted," says Angus. "Their role in the environment is vital [to human survival], whether it be in the pollination of flowers, which in turn produce the fruits we so enjoy, or the decomposition of matter. Insects are both beautiful and essential. I hope this exhibition will inspire conversations about what we value, the stories we are part of, and the small actions we can take today to make change for the greater good."

The species Angus uses are not endangered. They are either farm raised — primarily in Madagascar, Malaysia, Thailand, and Papua New Guinea — or collected by the indigenous peoples who live in the areas from which they originate. Angus recycles all insects, and many of them have been used repeatedly in her shows for nearly 20 years. Her rule: she only uses insects with all six legs intact. If they are missing parts or she can't repair them, she then creates "hybrid" creatures for bell jars or other displays.

Angus has created art with insects since the late 1990s, presenting her work in solo and group exhibitions mostly in the mid-West, Canada and New York. Then, in

2015, her unique and captivating installations catapulted her to mainstream fame when her piece, *In the Midnight Garden*, was a part of *WONDER*, the inaugural exhibition for the reopening of the Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery. The beauty of Angus' work is not only in the extraordinary details, but also the artist's strong point of view.

"You are rewarded by looking slowly and carefully at Jennifer's work. It's a thought-provoking and aesthetic experience. It's experiential," says MFA Executive Director Kristen A. Shepherd. "This is not an exhibition about insects; it's about all of us. It's about beauty and where we find it; about what we value in the world; and about what we are prepared to do to change the stories happening all around us. With her work, Jennifer hopes to make people think about insects a little differently. With so much to see, visitors will want to experience this exhibition again and again, each time discovering something new."

'The Grasshopper and the Ant' and Other Stories



AS TOLD BY JENNIFER ANGUS

RELATED PROGRAMS

Oct 12 | 2-3:30 PM

PROCESS TALK WITH ARTIST JENNIFER ANGUS

Oct 27 | 2-3:30 PM

LECTURE WITH NICOLE SEYMOUR, AUTHOR OF *BAD ENVIRONMENTALISM*

Nov 3 | 2-3:30 PM

LECTURE WITH HEATHER SWAN, AUTHOR OF *WHERE HONEYBEES THRIVE*

Nov 6 | 10-11 AM

MUSEUM MINIS: INCREDIBLE INSECTS!

Nov 12 | 2-3 PM

INSECTS AS ADORNMENT

Nov 14 | 6:30-7:30 PM

BOOK CLUB @ THE MFA: *MOSTLY DEAD THINGS*

Nov 14 | 7-8 PM

MONEY, BEAUTY, POWER: THE OBSESSIVE OPULENCE OF AMERICA'S GILDED AGE

Nov 15 | 6-9 PM

BUGSGIVING, AN INSECT DINNER EVENT FEATURING CHEF JOSEPH YOON OF BROOKLYN BUGS

Nov 16 | 11 AM-2 PM

EXPLORE MORE! FAMILY DAYS: ALL ABOUT INSECTS!

Nov 16 | 2-3:30 PM

LECTURE WITH ARTIST JENNIFER ANGUS

Nov 25 | 9 AM-4 PM

GRATEFUL FOR GRASSHOPPERS DAY CAMP FOR GRADES 1-4

Dec 31 | 7 PM-1 AM

NEW YEARS EVE @ THE MFA: FLIGHTS OF FANCY

MFASTPETE.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION

Suggested Social Media Posts

Insects as art? Check out the artistry of Jennifer Angus, who is using thousands of exotic insects in 7,000 square feet of galleries at @mfastpete. On view through January 5! #mfastpete #weloveinsects

The artist Jennifer Angus uses the medium of dried exotic insects and it's an entire experience at @mfastpete. "The Grasshopper and the Ant' and Other Stories, as told by Jennifer Angus" is on view through January 5! #mfastpete #insectlove

When you think of insects, art may not be the first word that comes to mind. It'll all make sense when you check out "The Grasshopper and the Ant' and Other Stories, as told by Jennifer Angus" at @mfastpete. On view through January 5. #mfastpete

Neo-victorian wallpaper made from exotic insects, memento mori displays, a "Cabinet of Curiosities," an animal dinner party and more. "The Grasshopper and the Ant' and Other Stories, as told by Jennifer Angus" is a unique experience at @mfastpete. #mfastpete

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

The MFA at 255 Beach Drive NE has a world-class collection, with works by Monet, Morisot, Rodin, O'Keeffe, Willem de Kooning, and many other great artists. Also displayed are ancient Greek and Roman, Egyptian, Asian, African, pre-Columbian, and Native American art. Selections from the photography collection, one of the largest and finest in the Southeast, are on view in a gallery dedicated solely to the medium. Kristen A. Shepherd is the Executive Director.

Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, until 8 p.m. on Thursday, and noon-5 p.m. Sunday. Regular admission is \$20 for adults; \$15 for those 65 and older, Florida educators, college students, and active duty military; and \$10 for students 7 and older. Children under 7 and Museum members are admitted free. Groups of 10 or more adults pay only \$14 per person and children \$4 each with prior reservations. Also, admission is only \$10 after 5 p.m. on Thursday. The MFA Café is open from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday. For more information, please call 727-896-2667 or visit mfastpete.org.

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