

Interactive displays shed light on insect life

Rachel Barry
THE BATTALION

How many Unicorn Beetles can fit into a Volkswagen Bug?

Only one if it is from the "Backyard Monsters" exhibit which opened this weekend at the Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History and will run through April 24.

The exhibit features a series of interactive robotic insects and a display of over 500 exotic insects from around the world, and offers a glimpse into the lives of nature's misunderstood pests.

Elisabeth Pursley, special events liaison at the museum, said the exhibit offers a unique perspective for visitors.

"It's like suddenly you're the size of a bug," she said. "They are anatomically exact — you actually get to see how they work."

A pair of dragonflies with 10-foot wings hovers over the exhibit, and an enormous praying mantis eyes visitors.

Pursley said "Backyard Monsters" was an exciting exaggeration to interest and educate.

"Their sheer size is amazing," she said, "especially when you think about how small they are in real life."

Pursley said through a display called "Bug's Eye View," people can step into the oversized head of a bug and see the world through its compound eyes.

"It serves to enhance our appreciation of their place in our world," she said. "It gives you a sense of what their world is like."

Through nine interactive displays,

visitors have the opportunity to learn facts about insects.

Children can learn the difference between the thorax and antennae of an ant by taking apart a plastic replica of the insect and putting it back together. Another display allows visitors to move a robotic insect with a remote control.

In another display, children can step into the life of a larvae by climbing into an enlarged honeycomb.

But young, wingless creatures of the human kind aren't the only ones getting in on the action of "Backyard Monsters." "(Backyard Monsters) is interesting for a big span of ages," Pursley said. "It has a broad appeal."

Mindy Bryant, project chair for the service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega and a senior English major, said APO is helping the museum give tours to elementary school children.

Bryant said the exhibit is "absolutely amazing" and "definitely monstrous."

"Everybody thinks (bugs) are ugly, nasty, mean, useless creatures" she said. "But through the exhibit, you learn that they help with all kinds of things."

Bryant said the exhibit offers an opportunity for children to learn about insects while having fun.

"The more kids know, the better off they'll be," she said.

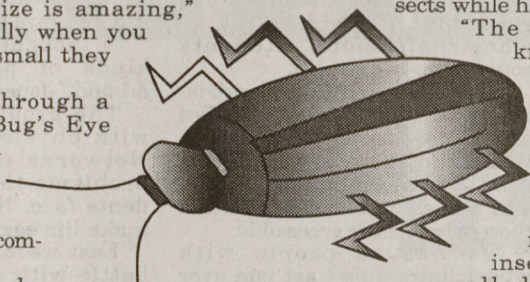
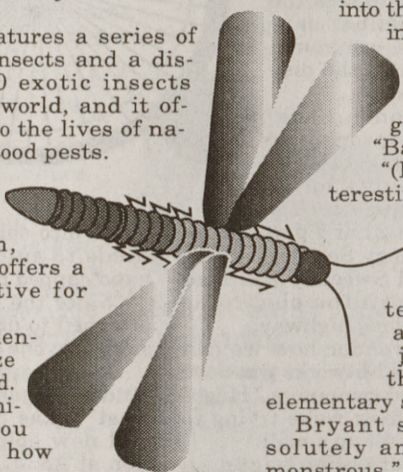
Pursley said the seven display cases exhibiting over 500 rare and exotic insects have been called one of the finest private collections in the world.

Pursley said the museum hopes to give residents of Bryan-College Station the opportunity to experience interesting exhibits without having to



First graders from Bonham Elementary School in Bryan try to locate the queen bee among a colony of live honey bees at the "Backyard Monsters" exhibit at the Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History.

Gwendolyn Struve, THE BATTALION



travel far. "We really feel a strong duty to provide an opportunity to the community where everyone can see them as opposed to driving to Houston or Dallas," she said. "Our primary goal is to provide an educational opportunity

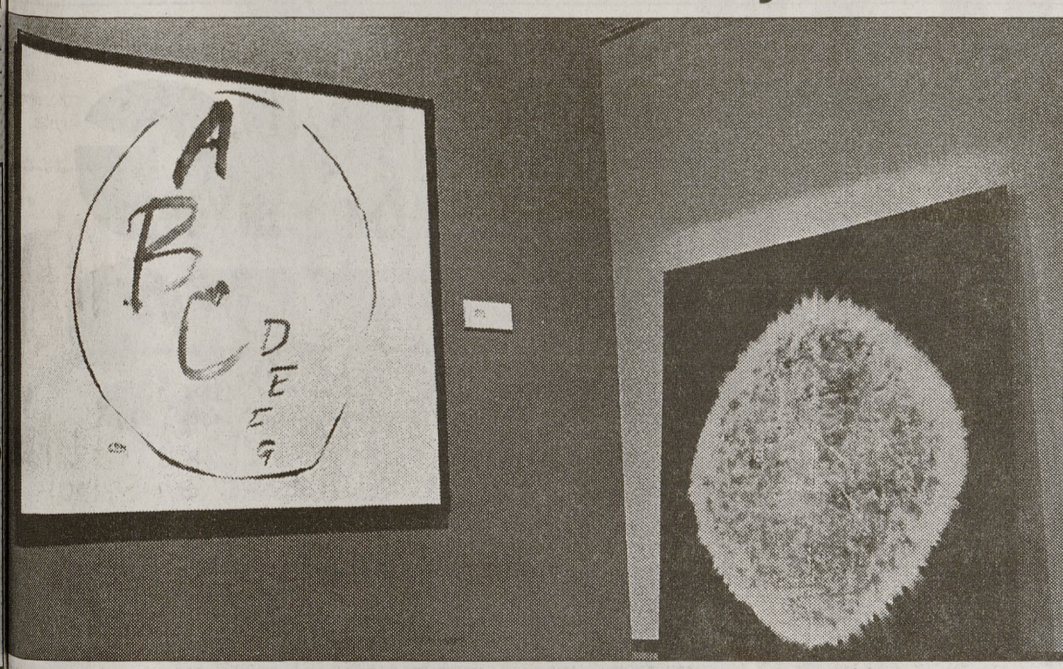
for the whole family that is fun and exciting.

"So the people who live here don't have to go elsewhere for quality family-oriented entertainment that is educational, as well as exciting, interesting and fun."

Looking into the colossal eyes of a praying mantis and stepping into the shadow of an enormous black widow spider tends to put humans in their place, Pursley said.

"It gives you a really good idea of what you are up against," she said.

Japanese symbols, icons convey artists' views of humanity, nature



Gwendolyn Struve, THE BATTALION

ink print (left) by Akiko Ishii and "Etiolation," a dyed silk piece by Rokugoh Harada are on display at "Expressive Iconography" exhibit at J. Wayne Stark University Center Galleries.

John LeBas
THE BATTALION

American audiences now have a unique opportunity to view Japanese art

Expressive Iconography: the work of Akiko Ishii and Rokugoh Harada will be displayed in the J. Wayne Stark University Center Galleries through April 14.

Catherine Hastedt, registrar and curator of the Stark Galleries, said the artists have developed a unique system of iconography to use in their works.

Iconography is a symbol system like our alphabet," she said. "I called this show 'Expressive Iconography' because I was interested by how each artist approached their art."

A press release says Ishii and Harada, both contemporary Japanese artists, use "traditional symbols and abstract images to convey deep meanings about humanity and nature."

Ishii creates traditional Japanese characters with calligraphy, capturing phrases and images from poems and ancient Japanese poems.

Ishii said art is best expressed in its imperfections. "It is most attractive when im-

perfect or fragmentary elements leave room for imaginary perfection in the mind of the observer," Ishii said. "Art should possess something which appeals strongly to the humanism of the spirit beyond national or racial bounds."

Many of Ishii's works are haikus, 17-syllable poems, and wakas, 31-syllable poems, written in large characters on paper scrolls and folding boards. Ishii spent years studying her art under a master, and such poems are traditional practice media for calligraphy trainees.

One piece, featuring a waka by Priest Dogen, admires the beauties of the four seasons and reads simply, "Blossoms in Spring, Cuckoos in Summer, Moonlight in Autumn and Snow in Winter."

Ishii also expresses several passages from the "Tale of the Heiki," an ancient Japanese poem. For one of these works, Ishii wrote a passage from a famous Heiki chapter about Buddha's temple: "Sounds of the chime at Buddha's temple sang the fragility of life ... Arrogance, like a dream in a spring night, cannot last long. Haughty people also die out eventually like dust in the winds."

Several pieces also came from the Kojiki, dated A.D. 717 and considered the oldest history book in Japan.

Ishii also uses her art to overstep "national and racial bounds." In a simple language comparison display, Ishii created two separate but similar ink-on-paper pieces. One reads "ABCDEFGH." The other, "I, Ro, Ha, Ni, Ho, He, To," is the Japanese equivalent of the first seven English letters.

Harada's ultra-modern work primarily consists of geometric shapes dyed on silk.

"She was inspired by looking through a microscope at things around the house, like dust," Hastedt said.

Two of Harada's comparable pieces, "Pebble" and "Bubbler," consist of 16 circles within 16 squares. The former is colored with browns and beiges and the latter with blues and grays.

"She uses the bright colors because she's very interested in color theory and how different colors react with each other," Hastedt said. Hastedt said people should take advantage of this chance to view Japanese art through the Galleries' open visitation and scheduled tours.

"This is the first time we've had Japanese art here," Hastedt said. "Providing a glimpse into the iconography of this Asian culture, the show represents a rare opportunity for American audiences to view their work."

Partners ride in style in Cowboy Limo

By Tab Dougherty
THE BATTALION

Texas has an attitude all its own, which is why Debbie and Stephen Hanel took a truck, stretched it and made the Cowboy Limousine.

"We wanted to start out with a truck simply because it's Texas, and I think it's very suitable," Stephen Hanel said. "It's very unique."

Started in August 1995, the Cowboy Limousine has enjoyed considerable success.

"We've been very satisfied," Stephen Hanel said. "As far as starting a new business and getting it going, we've been very pleased with the response."

The Cowboy Limo features all the comforts of a normal limo, including a privacy divider, a television and VCR, a stereo with a 10-disc changer, air conditioning controls for the back, facing couches, a cellular phone, an ice compartment and a bar. In addition to normal limousine features, the Cowboy Limo has something that only a truck has.

"It rides as well as a car limousine, and you're sitting higher," Hanel said. "One of the big features that I like in a truck limousine is it has a flat floor, and it doesn't have the big drive shaft coming up in the middle of the floor, so people are more comfortable in it, and it has more headroom than a car limousine. You can see better out of a truck. You can enjoy the ride and enjoy the view of what you're seeing as you go by better than you can in a car."

Hanel said these extra features make the Cowboy Limousine an enjoyable alternative to the normal car limo.

"It's the only one in the country," he said. "It's the first, and I'm sure there will be more. I really hope there will be. I'd like to see more limousine trucks because my customers that use it love it. I've had customers that have ridden in both the car limousine and the truck limousine, and they

like the truck limousine better."

Renee Metoyer, a sophomore psychology major, said she enjoyed riding in the Cowboy Limousine.

"At first, I had my doubts, but it was one of the best times I had," Metoyer said. "It was very comfortable and convenient. I'm sure I'll ride in it again."

Hanel said it is impossible to go anywhere without attracting strange looks from people.

"Everywhere you go, everybody wants to look at it," Hanel said. "It's just a lot of fun to ride in — to be in. People like the attention they get when they're in it because people are staring at the truck. It intrigues people."

Stephen Hanel said he has made many trips to the Houston Rodeo, and the Cowboy Limo is very convenient for his passengers.

"It holds six people comfortably," he said. "They (riders) don't have to worry about parking. If they want to drink and have a good time, they don't have to worry about driving. It drops you off and is there waiting when you come out. They can have as much fun as they want, and they don't have to worry about driving and traffic."

All of this positive response has encouraged the Hanelts to expand their rental service, and they plan to make more Cowboy Limos.

Matt Sanders, a sophomore general studies major, said he could not believe there was actually a truck limo.

"When I finally got in it," Sanders said, "I realized how much more than a normal limo it was."

Hanel said that when he tells people he owns a truck limousine, they cannot envision what it looks like.

"They think, 'Well, it's just an old truck that they did something to,' but this thing is as elegant as any car limousine," he said.

Hanel said he enjoys the stares and attention his Cowboy Limo receives and he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I just felt like in Texas, a limousine ought to be a truck," Hanel said.



The Cowboy Limo, a stretched Ford F-350 pickup truck, is owned by Debbie and Stephen Hanel.

Dave House, THE BATTALION