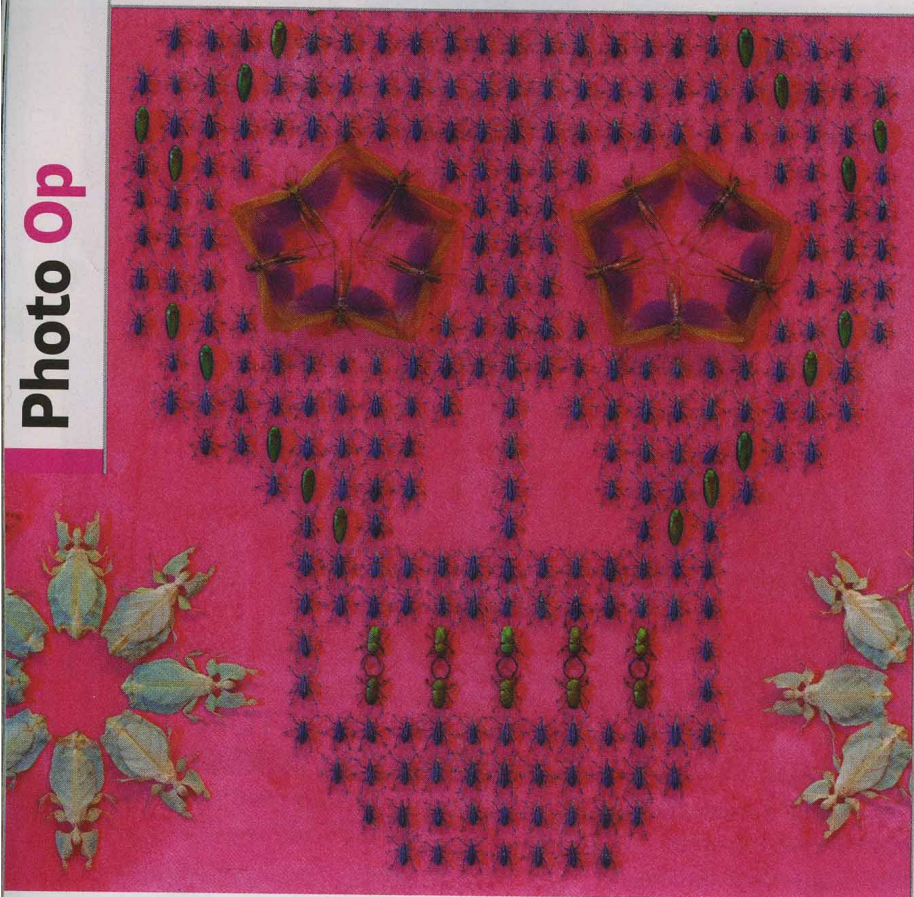


# muse<sup>®</sup>

JANUARY 2017



From Cricket Media



Jennifer Angus (above) was first bitten by the insect bug while researching the dress of tribal minorities in Northern Thailand. She discovered a group that used green metallic wings of beetles as fringe on a shawl. “I like shiny things, so they really appealed to me. Plus, I appreciated the ingenuity of using what was in their backyard,” she says. Angus later learned that the tribe wasn’t the only group to use insects as embellishments. During the Victorian period, British artisans used the same beetle wings. “They would cut them into disks, sequin-like shapes and apply them to textiles.”

The Victorian era helped inspire Angus’s *A Terrible Beauty*, a three-part series that appeared in three different museums from 2005 to 2008. The exhibitions tell the story of a fictional collector and adventurer. “He is sort of my alter ego,” Angus says.

Chapter one, titled “Creature Comforts,” invites the viewer into the collector’s home. In the Textile Museum of Canada, the four-room exhibit appears to be the living space of the collector, including a showcase of all his trinkets from traveling.

# BOXES OF BUGS

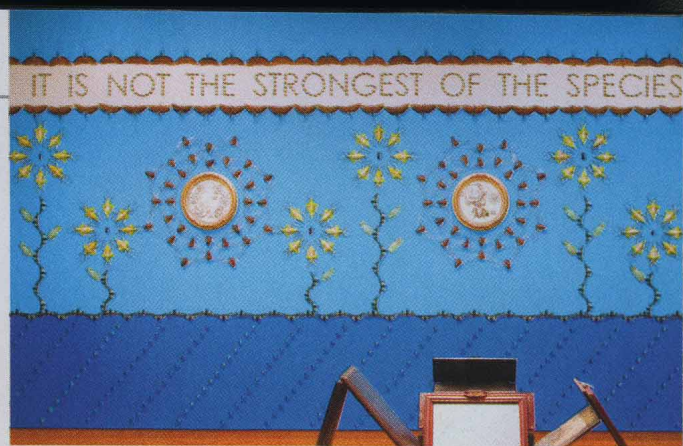
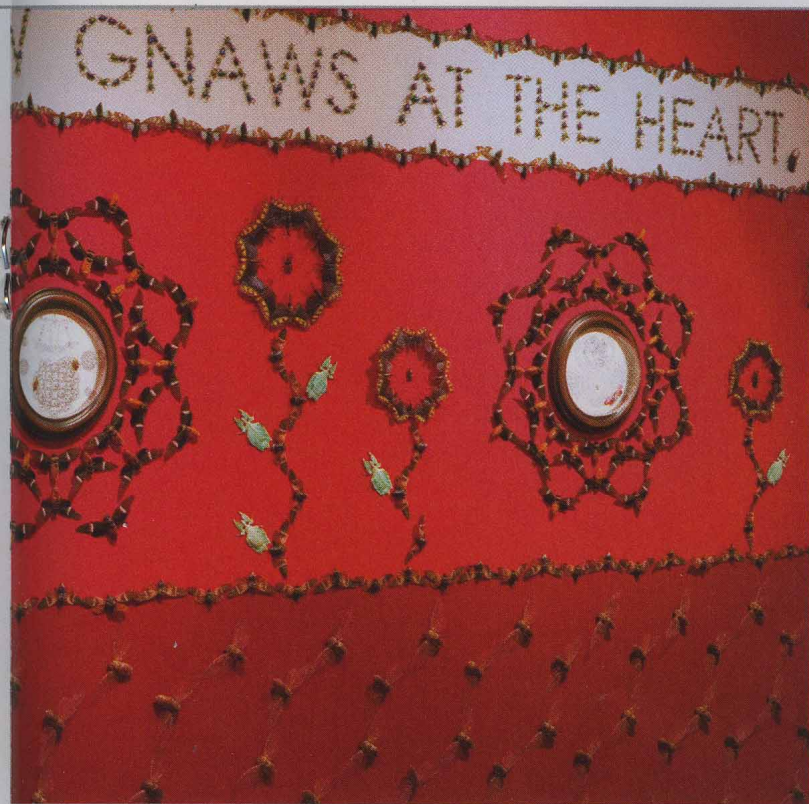
## THE SCIENCE & ART OF COLLECTING INSECTS

Collections of creepy crawlies can either be a person’s nightmare or an artist’s muse. Award-winning artist Jennifer Angus has 25,000 dead, dried insects in her collection. Using giant cicadas, brightly colored beetles, leaf insects, grasshoppers, and more, Angus carefully designs intricate patterns on walls using thousands of insects.

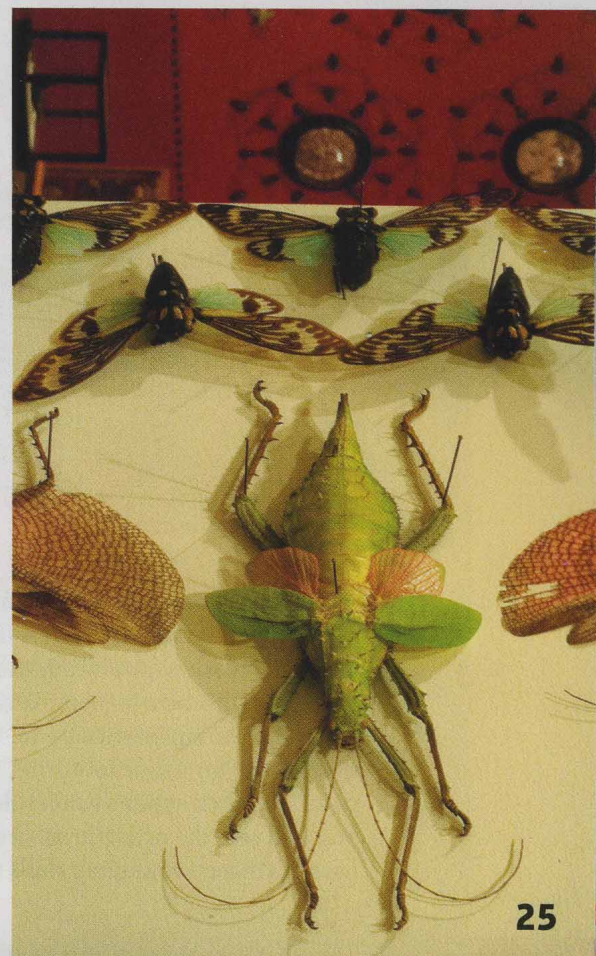
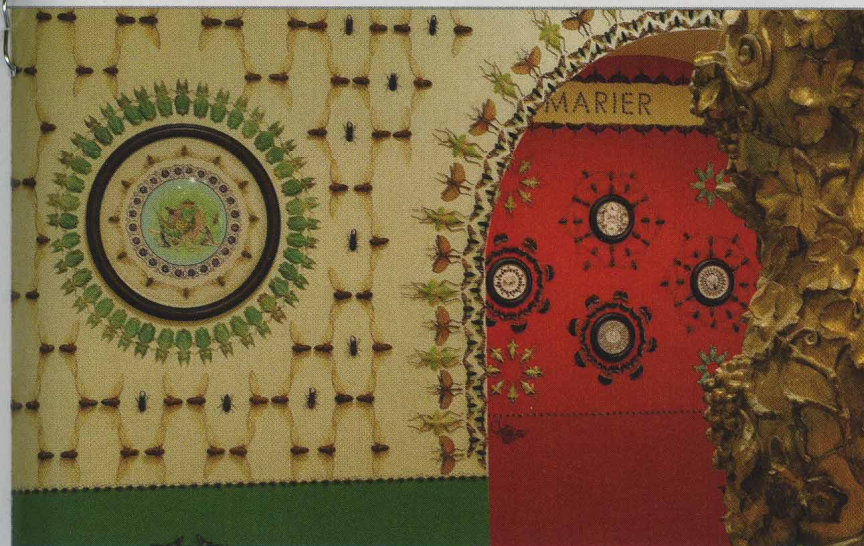
Shown above is an image from her *Wonder* exhibit at the Smithsonian American Art Renwick Gallery in Washington, DC.

“People don’t love insects. They love fluffy bunnies and cute tortoises. But insects play an important role in our ecosystem. The goal of my art is to create awareness and open a discussion,” she says. Her insect art has appeared in many countries, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, and Spain. She buys her insects from specimen dealers. Dealers gather them from a number of geographic regions and then sell to collectors, museums, and universities. She never uses threatened or endangered species in her art. Angus argues that it’s loss of habitat, and not collecting, that threatens insects, and she hopes her art will inspire preservation.



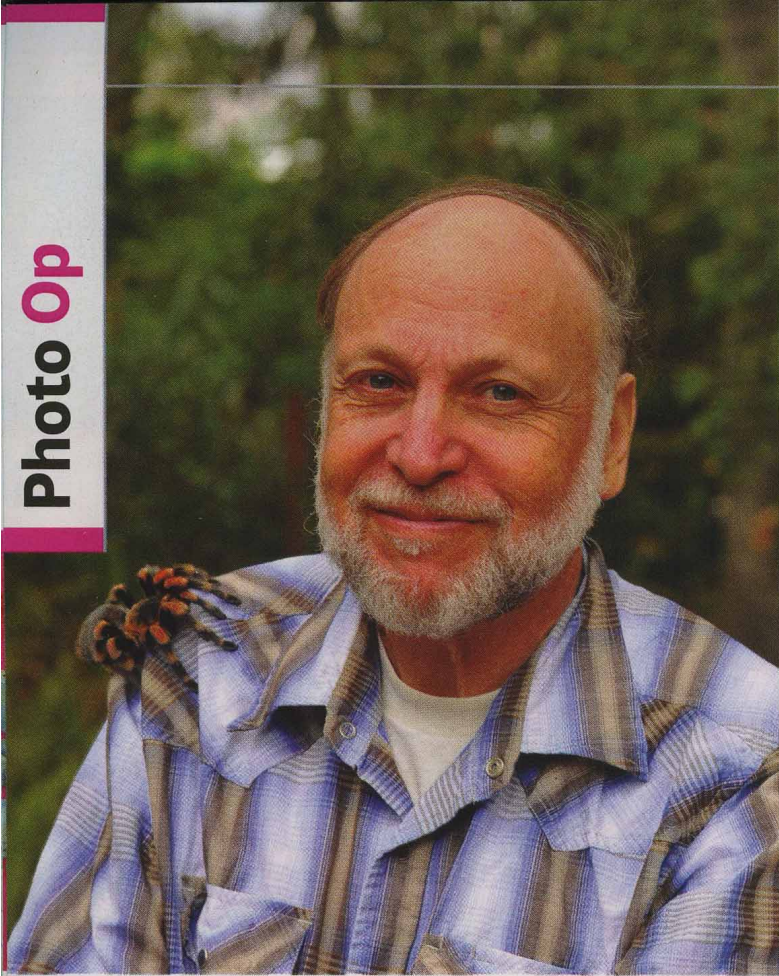


Chapter two of *A Terrible Beauty*, titled “Compulsion and Repulsion,” explores the difference between a collector’s public and private collections. “When you have a collection . . . the joy comes when talking about it, telling stories,” Angus says. But she adds that other collections are reserved for personal enjoyment. Two rooms in Michigan’s Dennon Museum Center comprise the exhibit. The blue room holds the collector’s public collection, sharing specimens and stories with eager viewers. The red room contains his private collection, sacred to his heart and shared with only a select few.



Chapter three of *A Terrible Beauty*, “To Have and To Hold,” concludes the experiential story of an obsessive collector. In Musée d’art de Joliette in Quebec, Canada, the exhibit shows how his collection grows excessive. His insects deteriorate and fade. His collection now owns him. “One thing I know—it doesn’t matter what you collect, eventually things are out of control. It’s impossible to stop,” the artist says.

Angus continues to explore collecting and insect oddities in her novel *In Search of Goliathus Hercules*—the story of Henri Bell, who discovers that he can talk with insects and embarks on a mission to find a mythical giant insect.



Whereas Jennifer Angus uses dead insects in her work, Steven Kutcher (left) uses live ones to make his art. An artist, educator, and entomologist, he has been collecting and wrangling insects for many years. Many know Kutcher as the Bug Man of Hollywood. He has worked as an entomology consultant on films including *Jurassic Park* and *Spider-Man*.

Titled *Bromeliad No 1 Zophobas*, the colorful painting at right was created with a superworm-as-brush. Kutcher feeds his bugs before they get busy creating so they don't get busy eating the paint. He also carefully cleans the insects afterward to ensure they are unharmed.



A darkling beetle paints the canvas red in Kutcher's studio. Kutcher doesn't have a favorite insect. "I love them all," he says. But he admits the most *artistic* bugs are those with nice big feet. "Darkling beetles, hissing cockroaches, superworms—all have a wide track and that makes for a nice footprint," he says. Using nontoxic paint, Kutcher applies watercolor to each foot of a live bug and sets the artist/brush free on paper. He then uses his insect-wrangling skills to help guide the bug.



Kutcher keeps a small insect zoo and a butterfly garden. He often uses bugs from his personal collection to create his art. If you are interested in collecting insects but don't want to kill them, Kutcher suggests a catch-and-release system of detaining each specimen for 24 hours while you gather data and then letting it go. Use plastic containers, and keep an ice chest on hand to keep the insect cool but not frozen. "Collecting insects teaches you how to look for, gather, and handle them and how to organize information—all of which are very important in protecting the species' habitat," he says.

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**Kristina Lyn Heitkamp** is a plein air writer and environmental journalist. Her book collection numbers more than 500 and includes an entomophagy cookbook. But Heitkamp has yet to cook and eat bugs.