

Entomologia

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By [Melissa Stern](#)

In the spirit of full disclosure, I admit that I love insects. Give me a Madagascar Hissing Cockroach, a dung beetle or a giant furry bumblebee, and I'm a happy camper. So it was with some bias that I journeyed to the edge of the Gowanus Canal last week to see Entomologia, an exhibition of artists who work with bugs and bug imagery. The exhibit is housed in a year-old exhibition space called The Observatory. Founded by a group of seven artists, The Observatory seeks to investigate "topics residing at the interstices of art and science, history and curiosity, magic and nature." This exhibition fulfills their mission to perfection.



"Caterpillar Doing Research," by Lisa Wood.

The small space contains works by 14 artists, ranging from the formal, scientific rendering of butterflies (Steve Thurston) to a giant contemporary photograph of a preying mantis that has just consumed its mate (Catherine Chalmers). A magnificent graphite drawing—nearly 8-foot-long, of the ventral view of a jewel bug—is by Joianne Bittle, who has rendered the insect in meticulous detail. The magnification of tiny details into huge, almost abstract shapes allows the drawing to leap back and forth between abstraction and hyper-realism. Though some of the artists employ digital methods and materials, a pleasing air of nostalgia pervades. The show is fairly formal, serious, even contemplative, allowing the sheer beauty of the creatures to stealthily sneak up on you.

The Observatory is wedged in-between several other eccentric and equally delightful exhibition spaces: The Morbid Anatomy Laboratory, The Reanimation Library and the Hall of the Gowanus. It all adds up to a delightful and uncompromisingly odd afternoon on the canal.

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Through Apr. 4, The Observatory, 543 Union St., Brooklyn, observatoryroom.org