

Jennifer Angus

Eupholus bennetti

TUSK GALLERY, TORONTO

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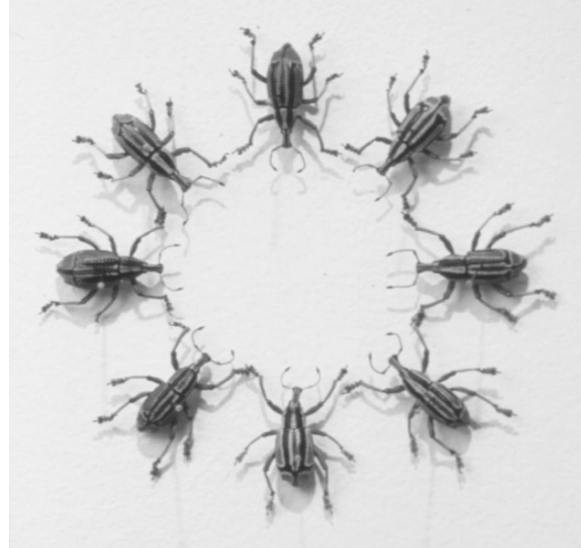
by Paula Gustafson

Eupholus bennetti is an installation of 1,680 insects which textile artist Jennifer Angus pinned directly onto two intersecting walls in a repeating pattern. The insect, a weevil from Papua New Guinea (*Eupholus bennetti*), was chosen because its physical beauty—vivid, iridescent hues of blue, green, and purple—makes it appear to be non-threatening. Indeed, viewed at a comfortable distance, the installation resembles nothing more than geometrically-patterned wallpaper.

Very little of Angus's current endeavors involve cloth; nevertheless, her work continues to be informed by textile tradition and its language of pattern. She points out that, in many cultures throughout history, the patterns and colours of cloth have been used to communicate information about a wearer's age, sex, ethnic identity, and social status. The colourful insect wings in *Eupholus bennetti* reference natural materials such as sea shells and feathers which were historically used to embellish clothing—and which have since been replaced by commercially-produced beads and sequins.

Eupholus bennetti also alludes to the unseen world of dust mites, germs, and bacteria, both friendly and not. "My work explores ideas of home and comfort," Angus writes. When she lived in Toronto, her apartment was located above a laundromat and beside a convenience store—a optimum breeding ground for vermin. Well-meaning friends warned her about the diseases she might catch from mice and roaches.

"One month I caught 21 mice," she recalls. "I used to feel sorry for them, but by the time number 15 came along, my sympathy was exhausted." The wildlife in and around her apartment, however, spurred her to do some research into the connection



between insects and disease. "In the mid-12th century, when the Bubonic Plague struck, many believed that rats were the source of the disease, but in fact it was the fleas which resided on the rodents who were the actual carriers," she reports. "These days, AIDS is our modern plague. As a frequent visitor to Thailand, where AIDS is taking a devastating toll, I've heard foreign travellers discuss the possibility of whether a mosquito can transmit HIV, the AIDS virus."

"Western culture in particular has a certain hysteria when it comes to insects. They are symbols of dirtiness, disease, and decay," she notes. "Yet in other cultures insects hold religious significance, or at least a measure of respect, be it as food, medicine, embellishment, or pets.

In *Eupholus bennetti*, Angus has pinned down an uneasy interface between our anxiety about 'dirty' bugs and our desire for domestic order. But, like the child who worries about things that live in the dark under their bed, what happens when the gallery doors are closed for the night? What if the insects come to life and start to move—as the figures did in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's classic story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*?♦

Jennifer Angus is currently assistant professor of textile design at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.