

Keeping An Eye On Things

Images © 2008 Suzanne Stryk

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The Collector's Eye © Leah Stoddard 2008 (An earlier version appeared as a wall didactic for Suzanne Stryk's exhibit at Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2004)

The Natural Connection © Jessica Evans 2008

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East Tennessee State University and General Shale Brick Natural History Museum and Gray Fossil Site

1212 Suncrest Drive PO Box 9221 Gray, TN 37615

front cover: detail, Field Work #15, mixed media on paper, 22" x 30" right: Bird in the Hand, mixed media on paper, 8.5" x 11.5" opposite: photo of the artist's sketchbook



Keeping An Eye On Things

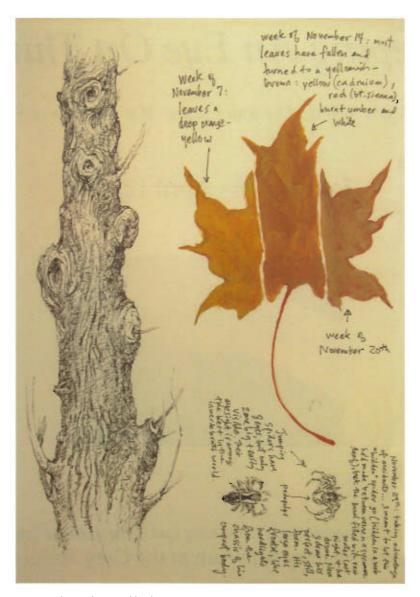
Paintings and Drawings by Suzanne Stryk

January 10 - April 12, 2009



East Tennessee State University and General Shale Brick Natural History Museum at the Gray Fossil Site

Gray, Tennessee

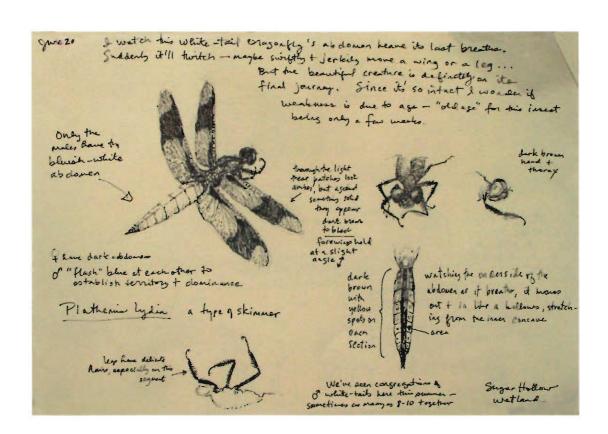


above and opposite: sketchbook pages

We are here to witness. There is nothing else to do with those mute materials we do not need...all we can do with the whole inhuman array is watch it.... If we were not here...the show would play to an empty house, as do all those falling stars which fall in the daytime. That is why I take walks: to keep an eye on things.

—Annie Dillard

Teaching a Stone to Talk





THE NATURAL CONNECTION by Jessica Evans

It is a special gift of Homo sapiens that (with our large brains) we are able to meet our ultimate goal of survival with time to spare — time to reflect and to study and to make art. Sadly, in modern times, it seems that man's connection with nature is a tenuous one. If we are lucky, we might catch a glimpse of a falling star or a bird taking flight, or find a fossil. Fortunately, there are some who still nurture the connection. Like a scientist in the field, the artist Suzanne Stryk waits ... watches ... studies ... sketches.

Stryk believes that science and art are both "translators of nature, attempting to explain the mysterious." As two faces of the same coin, science and art can differ in appearance, yet complement each other in their processes and in their explanations of the natural world. The artist listens, keeps a close eye, and attempts to translate the voice of nature so that others may hear. But the artist, also, sometimes resembles a scientist: collecting evidence, investigating what the subject can tell us, and interpreting this data to the rest of the world. Yet, in turn, the scientist at times resembles the artist: gathering specimens, arranging them in a fitting order, deliberating, then telling the story...







According to Stryk, the allure of exhibiting "art about nature in a science museum"

is that the art "humanizes the science...by interpreting it." It encourages visitors to think

of how scientific findings relate to our personal observations of the world. When experi-

encing natural objects next to her sketched impressions of them, and next to finished paint-

ings as well, the viewer becomes witness to the surprising similarities in the processes of

art and science — and Stryk enjoys blurring the distinction. Drawing on the language of

science and modern genetics — A's, G's, T's and C's, chromosome pairs, and the iconic

double helix — Stryk subtly recreates the connection and understanding that we were not

aware we were missing.

In Stryk's drawings, we see unique features of the natural world that any of us

could see and hear — if we were to actually stop, look, and listen. Stryk offers us a win-

dow through which to view this natural realm and its intimate moments at our leisure.

Along with an obvious reverence for her subject matter, her training as a scientific illustra-

tor is evident in the precise detail she gives to the minute forms of insect life, and to the

tangled nest, or the organized structure of a single feather. Though layered with meaning, her interpretations of nature are in the simplest form. An image. And the message within

it that Stryk gives is clear — that though science has cracked the code of life, we may look

to art to discover its full meaning.

Jessica Evans is Exhibitions and Marketing Coordinator at the ETSU Natural History Museum at the Gray Fossil Site. She holds a BFA with ceramics concentration from East Tennessee State University.



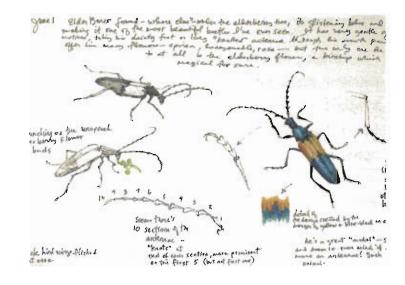


SUZANNE STRYK AND THE COLLECTOR'S EYE by Leah Stoddard

Nothing for Stryk goes unnoticed. For decades she has recorded her experiences with nature in sketchbooks that are as much journals of her walks around her home in Bristol, Virginia, as they are scientific documentations of a certain species of bird lying dead or beetle found. Minute details of her discoveries trigger an urge to record, and often later become part of a painting. In addition to insect life, the artist is fascinated by bird imagery in her work, where parts (feathers, eggs, nests) become metaphoric stand-ins for "bird" as well as allusions to human experience. Like the enigmatic Rosetta Stone, Stryk's beautiful mixed media panels invite close investigation, beckoning a deciphering of her personal iconography.



opposite: detail, *Daily Observa*tions (insects), mixed media on paper, 10" x 14" right: sketchbook page Stryk insists we are all collectors in some way, that we share an "impulse to order and control the natural world." The artist demonstrates her collector persona in her meticulously painted and structured compositions: in the antenna of a beetle or the shift of hues and patterns from egg to egg. She is as much a sculptor as a painter, teasing fibers from a



bird's nest to render them tactile or scratching notations into her gesso that are part science, part poetry, and all obsession. Most recently, Stryk has taken to incorporating actual



plant material — fern leaves, wild grape vines, grasses — to subtle, dimensional effect. Pairing text and image, the viewer enters an imaginary dialogue, piecing through the many visual tropes whose humble beginnings may have been a trek in the woods one late afternoon.

above: sketchbook page

left: Wood Notes II, mixed media on panel, 20" x 26"

opposite: detail, Wood Notes II



On the luminous stage of these works, Stryk paints with a skilled attention to detail. Just as she organizes the organic, so too do we separate ourselves from the disorder of the natural world in our architecture, our automobiles, our central heating, our clothing. Yet, in Stryk's mind, the division is false: "Safely protected in our homes," she describes, "we pride ourselves in overcoming the hazards of wildness, yet deep in the spiraling chains of every cell in our bodies is wildness itself." The language Stryk reveals to us is not a separate voice, but our own.

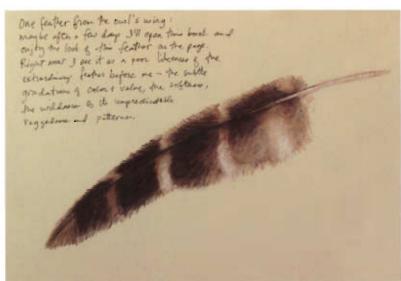
Leah Stoddard is an independent curator and artist consultant based in Charlottesville, VA, where from 2000-2008 she was director of the nonprofit artspace Second Street Gallery. She has a MA in Art History and Criticism from SUNY-Stony Brook in Stony Brook, New York, and served as Associate Curator and Registrar at the Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, from 1994-98.



opposite: Wonder Rooms, mixed media on wood, 15" x 15" left: detail, Green House



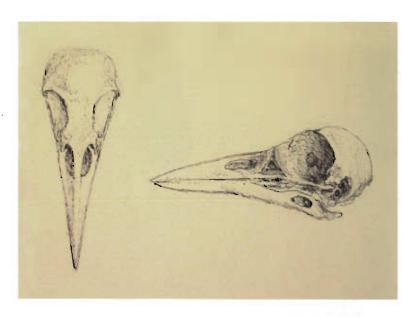




above: sketchbook pages opposite: *The Collector's Question,* mixed media on panel, 38" x 36"









above: sketchbook pages opposite: *Primitive Science*, mixed media on panel, 20" x 18"



opposite: detail, Daily Observations (beetles)

above: Specimen Days, mixed media on panel, 30" x 30"

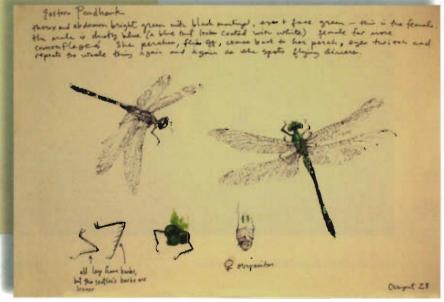
opposite: detail, Taking a Walk #1

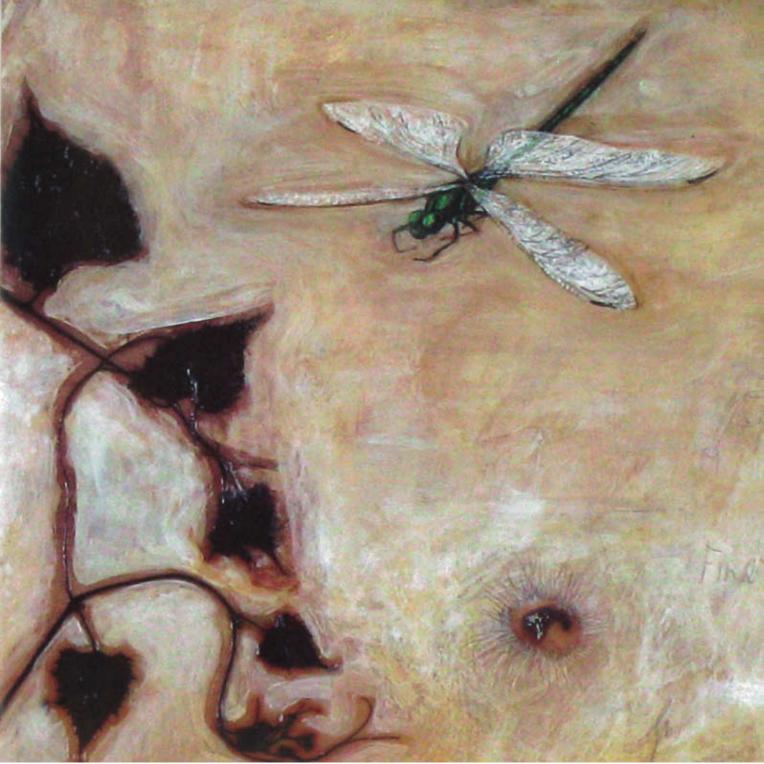
top right: Taking a Walk #1, mixed media on panel, 24" x 24"

bottom right: sketchbook page below: detail, sketchbook page









EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

<u>Paintings</u>

Taking a Walk #1, mixed media on wood panel, 24" x 24", 2008

The Distance Between Us, mixed media on wood panels, 28" x 54", 2007

Excavation, mixed media on wood panel, 40" x 60", 2007

Green House, mixed media on wood panel, 15" x 15", 2007

Wonder Rooms, mixed media on wood panel, 15" x 15", 2007

Landfill, mixed media on wood panel, 15" x 15", 2007

Specimen Days, mixed media on wood panel, 30" x 30", 2006

Little Wing, mixed media on wood panel, 36" x 40", 2005

Wood Notes II, mixed media on wood panel, 20" x 26", 2004

Primitive Science, mixed media on wood panel, 20" x 18", 2002

The Collector's Question, mixed media on wood panel, 38" x 36", 2001

The Collector's Calendar, mixed media on wood panel, 38" x 36", 2001



Assemblages

The Shape of the Journey, mixed media (acrylic on handmade book, cicada wings and larva, ferns, topographical map in Riker specimen box), 12" x 8", 2008

Book of Hours II, mixed media (acrylic on handmade book, grasses in Riker specimen box), 6" x 5", 2007

Down to Earth, mixed media (acrylic on handmade book, grasses and leaf, plant stains on paper in Riker specimen box), 8.25" x 6.25", 2007

World Enough, mixed media (acrylic on handmade book, leaf, carbon paper in Riker specimen box), 6.5" x 8.5", 2006

Drawings

Takes One to Know One, mixed media on paper, 11.5" x 8.5", 2008

Bird in the Hand, mixed media on paper, 11.5" x 8.5", 2008

Understory, mixed media on paper, 11.5" x 8.5", 2008

Mimic, mixed media on paper, 11.5" x 8.5", 2008

Field Work #15, mixed media on paper, 22" x 30", 2008

Field Work #14, mixed media on paper, 22" x 30", 2007

Notes from the Miocene (turtle), mixed media on paper, 11.5" x 8.5", 2007

Notes from the Miocene (alligator), mixed media on paper, 11.5" x 8.5", 2007

Notes from the Miocene (tapir), mixed media on paper, 11.5" x 8.5", 2007

Daily Observations (collection), mixed media on paper, 10" x 14", 2005

Daily Observations (beetles), mixed media on paper, 10" x 14", 2005

Daily Observations (wasps), mixed media on paper, 10" x 14", 2005

Sketchbooks from 1990-2008. All sketchbook pages are 5.5" x 11.5", Pentallic Sketchbook and Micron pigma pen.



top: Daily Observations(wasp), mixed media on paper, 10" x 14"

bottom: detail, sletchbook page opposite: Book of Hours II



SUZANNE STRYK

Born: 1953 Chicago, Illinois Resides: Bristol, Virginia For more information on the artist visit www.suzannestryk.com

Solo Exhibitions (selected)

Blue Spiral I, Asheville, NC 1998, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 United States Botanic Garden, West Orangerie Gallery, Washington, DC 2007

McLean Project for the Arts, McLean, VA 2007 Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, GA 2007 National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD 2007

Eleanor D. Wilson Museum, Hollins University, Roanoke, VA 2006

William King Regional Arts Center, Abingdon, VA 2005-2006

Second Street Gallery, City Center for Contemporary Art,

Charlottesville, VA 2004

Cumberland Gallery, Nashville, TN 1998, 2000, 2003

Fernbank Museum of Natural History, Atlanta, GA 2003

Grover/Thurston Gallery, Seattle, WA 2003

Hunt Gallery, Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, VA 2002

gescheidle Gallery, Chicago, IL 2002

Brown Gallery, Duke University, Durham, NC 2002

Catherine Smith Gallery, ASU, Boone, NC 2001

The National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC 2000

The Spartanburg County Museum of Art, Spartanburg, SC 2000

Carroll Reece Museum, Johnson City, TN. 1999

The Carnegie (Visual Arts Center), Covington, KY 1999

1912 Gallery, Emory and Henry College, Emory, V. 1999

Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Newport News, VA 1998

Holden Gallery, Warren Wilson College, Asheville, NC 1997

Ralston Fine Art, Johnson City, TN. 1997, 1995, 1991

Trahern Gallery, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN 1996

Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA),

Winston-Salem, NC (2-person show) 1995

Spirit Square Center for the Arts, , Charlotte, NC 1994

McGuffey Art Center, Charlottesville, VA 1993

above: photo of the artist

opposite left: Notes from the Miocene (fossil turtle from the Gray

Fossil Site)

opposite right: sketchbook page



Collections

Smithsonian Institution, (NMAS Art and Flight Collection), DC Eleanor B. Wilson Museum, Hollins University, Roanoke, VA The University of Virginia's College at Wise, Wise, VA Tennessee State Museum, Nashville, TN Carroll Reece Museum, ETSU, Johnson City, TN Spirit Square Center for the Arts, Charlotte, NC Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, Abingdon, VA Johnson City Public Library, Johnson City, TN Medical College of Virginia Hospitals, VCU, Richmond, VA The National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C. Woodson Art Museum, Wausau, WI Dollar General Corporation, Nashville, TN Evergreen Conference Center Hotel, Atlanta, GA Bank of America (Southeastern Collection), Charlotte, NC Meadowview Convention Center, Kingsport, TN Merrill Lynch, Asheville, NC Radford Hospital, Radford, VA BF Goodrich, Charlotte, NC Chattanooga Conference Center, Chattanooga, TN Benziger Winery (Imagery Estates Collection), Glen Ellen, CA

Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, VA

Awards and Honors (selected)

George Sugarman Foundation Grant 2007

2005 Selected for The Drawing Center's Viewing Program, NY, NY

2002 Artist-in-Residence, Centrum Arts, Port Townsend, WA

2000 Anselm Atkins Award, The Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Sciences, Rabun Gap, GA

1999 Fellowship, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Sweet Briar, VA

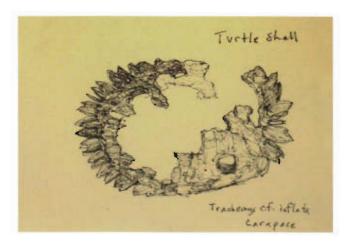
1997 Purchase Award, Carroll Reece Museum, Johnson City, TN

1996 Individual Artists Grant Finalist, National Endowment for the Arts

First Place, Exhibition Award, Art Museum of Western Virginia, 1994 Roanoke, VA

1990 First Place, Mid-Atlantic Exhibition Award, D'Art Center, Norfolk, VA





Bibliography (selected)

Justice, Adam. "Female(s) Form(s)," catalog essay, William King Regional Arts Center, Abingdon, VA 2008

Parsons, Laura. "Inspired Alchemy," Virginia Living, October 2007.

Mangold, Matthew. Interview, "Second Nature: The Art of Suzanne Strvk," William King Regional Arts Center, Abingdon, VA 2005.

Parsons, Laura. Review, "Natural Wonders: Stryk's Jeweled Insights," The Hook (Charlottesville, VA), February 19-25, 2004.

Knowles, Susan. Review, Art Papers, September/October, 2003.

Cullum, Jerry. "A Dialogue Between Art and Science," Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 8 June 2003.

Feaster, Felicia. "The Art of Science" (review), Atlanta Creative Loafing,

Bevil, William. "An Interview with Suzanne Stryk," Fernbank Magazine, Summer 2003.

Bostick, Alan. "Kroll, Stryk nestle work at Cumberland Gallery," The Tennessean, 14 May, 2000.

Hopes, David. Review, The Asheville Citizen-Times, 21 May 2000.

Jones, Jill. "The Collector's Dream: Interview with Suzanne Stryk," The Spartanburg County Museum of Art, Spartanburg, SC 2000.

James, Curtia. Review, Art Papers, March-April, 1999.

Watson, Fran. Review, Cincinnati CityBeat, Volume 5, Issue 16, March,

Sultan, Terrie. From These Hills (catalog essay), William King Regional Arts Center, Abingdon, VA

Roberts-Pullen, Paulette, Review, Richmond Times-Dispatch, 2 April, 1996. Patterson, Tom. Review, The Charlotte Observer, 30 January 1994.

Museum Natural History

