

7. TANYA CHALY



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Viewing an exhibition by **Tanya Chaly** is akin to entering a Victorian parlour of natural curiosities. Part investigative artist, part forensic scientist, Chaly's creates drawings, paintings and prints that meticulously observe various species of animal, bird and insect life going through a process of biological change or mutation due to environmental degradation. Rather than preserving individual specimens in formaldehyde or pinning them up in display cases, the artist employs skillful draughtsmanship to carefully document these specimens in graphite, charcoal and pigment.

Chaly's artworks are both beautiful and macabre; she often punctures her works on paper to demonstrate the infestation of parasites and viral strains on various creatures - from a colony of bats to a swarm of insects - which leads to biological mutation.

A 2014 suite of drawings, *Tidings of Invisible Things*, depicted the impact of the *Ribeira Ondatrae* parasite on a colony of frogs, linked to the run-off of phosphates from fertiliser use. The deformed frogs are intricately recorded and then placed in 19th century style frames, which are arranged in the formation of atrazine molecule, a popular herbicide in the United States. Similarly, in *Complex Contingencies* (2016), the artist continued this theme with 'forensic suites' of mutated insects grouped together in a variety cellular structures.

Through such installations the artist examines the delicate balance of our ecosystem and how little it takes to throw the natural world into disorder, through manmade industrial and agricultural practices. Her scientific observations of wildlife provide empirical examples of the destructive impact of civilisation on individual ecosystems and the biological cycle.

In 2014, this New York-based artist was recipient to the New York Explorer's Club Artist-in-Exploration award (sponsored by Rolex USA), which allowed her to travel to Central Mozambique in 2015 to work with scientists involved in the restoration of the Gorongosa National Park. Her fieldwork project was to produce a series based on the Parks mission to sustain the region's fragile biodiversity.

The Sydney born-artist, who studied and taught in France before moving New York a decade ago, has gradually been garnering the critical attention of privately funded institutions and University curators across the United States.

Over the past year Chaly has worked with molecular biologists for 'The Ligo Project Art of Science Residency', (at the John Pettrini Lab in New York) and held three solo University shows - at Laguardia CUNY, Long Island City, Alvernia University, Reading, Pennsylvania and at The McCarthy Art Gallery, St Michael's College, Vermont.

2017 will be another busy year for Chaly, beginning with a residency programme and solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Art Cluster. Her recent award of the Zeta Orionis Fellowship will also lead to a stint at the Vermont Studio Center in the North American Spring.

Future projects include travelling to more biodiversity hotspots around the world to study wildlife and highlight environmental issues. Through her rigorous scientific methods of observation, Tanya Chaly's artistic 'cabinets of curiosities' reveal the precarious nature of our ecosystems and the urgent need to attend to their preservation and conservation.

Victoria Hynes

1. // Tanya Chaly, *Inhaling The Spore*, 2015. Graphite on parchment, punctured drawing, encaustic wax under convex glass and plexi glass domes, dimensions varied.
2. // Tanya Chaly, *Mbidzi-Zebra*, 2015. Gouache, ink and watercolor on Pungwue River soil ground and acrylic binder, 23 x 28cm.
3. // Tanya Chaly, *Cu baliwa Cutswa-Gorongosa in Restoration*, Exhibition installation view The Explorers Club, New York, December 2015.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST.

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