

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Guilty By Association

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in Visual Arts

By

Reza Hashemizadeh

May 2012

The thesis of Reza Hashemizadeh is approved:

Lesley Krane, M.F.A. Date

Patsy Cox Date

Samantha Fields, Chair Date

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, my mother and my father, whose unconditional love and compassion have made this world a better place to live in.

Table of Contents

Signature Page	ii
Dedication	iii
Abstract	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: A Guilty Conscience	3
Chapter 3: Acting Upon Realization	5
Chapter 4: A Never Ending Journey	8
Chapter 5: Conclusion	10
References/Bibliography/Works Cited	11
Appendix	12

ABSTRACT

Guilty By Association

By

Reza Hashemizadeh

Master of Arts in Visual Arts

My thesis project explores my fascination with evolution, nature, science, technology, and the human need to progress. I am especially interested in mutations, those found naturally and those introduced artificially into the world in the name of Science. My work does not pass judgment on this subject, but it evokes my sense of awe and curiosity about the natural world's future.

Chapter1: Introduction

The natural world no longer depends on time or selection to evolve. It has crossed paths with something far more powerful and much faster in the form of technology. This relatively new determinant, combined with the insatiable catalyst of human greed and consumption, has effectively changed the outcome for future generations. One may argue to maintain hope, that humans may use this technology and positively serve the world to provide basic resources, including food, water and medicine, yet the past has revealed time and again that the human craving for power nullifies any logic put forth by necessity. Synonymous with bombs and weapons, nuclear energy has many benefits if properly controlled. An article on world-nuclear.org states that “Nuclear energy provides 16% of the world's electricity,” along with “not so well known Radioisotopes (radioactive forms of elements) and radiation that have several beneficial applications in agriculture, medicine, industry and research.”¹ However, potential for such good is kept on the back burner and the masses are led to think that progress is measured by a nation’s ability to launch far-reaching weapons capable of rendering unimaginable destruction and sorrow.

Playing God to feel invincible and in control has become an aphrodisiac for many successful individuals and governments alike. The dawn of the industrial revolution triggered an irreversible reaction, the outcome of which has yet to be determined. From kings and chieftains to conquerors and politicians, the primordial need for one-upmanship becomes stronger as time passes.

¹ "Non-power Uses of Nuclear Energy." *World Nuclear Association*. Web. 03 May 2012. <<http://www.world-nuclear.org>>.

Technology has always been at the forefront of this epic revolt in which giant corporations compete with electronic products as their pawns. No sooner does a phone or computer hit the shelves than it becomes outdated. Planned obsolescence has become the norm. Like egotistical male birds trying to outdo one another with displays of their resplendent plumage, human's only goal is to win the ultimate prize of power and control, the metaphorical feather in the cap that signifies virility, strength and desirability. Modern people crave neither gold nor silver; they want to be in charge of the most potent scientific sorcery in the form of technology. Weaponry, genetic engineering, internet ingenuity and surveillance satellites are only some of these symbolic feathers that they flaunt with pride to make the opposition bow in submission. While common people continue to strive for basic necessities, they are made to believe that they are all part of a bigger and greater purpose. Those in control, along with the media, seduce common people into buying and consuming products that wreak havoc on nature and the planet. "Progress" has disguised this phenomenon into an acceptable desire. My own hands participate in this fraught exchange, and being part of the problem weighs heavily on my shoulders.

Chapter 2: A Guilty Conscience

No matter how obvious and destructive this insatiable greed and constant desire to consume may be, everyone is complicit and guilty in this process, even if only by association. Making art gives visual voice to my displeasure about this system; to stand by in the face of futility and do nothing at all contributes further to the problem.

I acknowledge that not all progress is negative. In fact it offers humanity several benefits, especially in the field of medicine. While progress in modern science and genetic engineering has led to miraculous discoveries, it also leaves a trail of complications, side effects, and greed that counter the benefits. The co-opting of medical and technological breakthroughs by the military, by global multi-national companies, and by wealthy individuals for personal gain and profit has become a fact of life. Though diseases like HIV/AIDS are controlled with medication, the profits generated by these drugs consume companies, and “the poorest countries already struggling to manage their HIV epidemic are the ones least likely to benefit from the current system”.²

New and improved technologies have spawned distorted lovechildren of science and man. The lab rat with a human ear growing out of its back³, and a glow in the dark

² "Reducing the Price of HIV/AIDS Treatment." *Www.avert.org* Is Copyright © AVERT, 2011. Web. 03 May 2012. <<http://www.avert.org/generic.htm>>.

³ "Artificial Liver 'could Be Grown'" *Http://news.bbc.co.uk*. 25 Apr. 2002. Web. 03 May 2012. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/1949073.stm>>.

cat⁴ are only some of the new progeny that even billions of years of evolution could not yield. These creatures and their existence raise questions for humanity: Do they signify progress in the fields of science and medicine or more sinister and subversive intentions? Are they tokens of a desire to play God or beneficent tools to save humanity? As an artist and citizen, I ask these questions in my work. I want to uncover the truth of such discoveries and innovations, and fearing the consequences should concern all discerning audiences.

⁴ Choi, Charles. "Glow-in-the-Dark Kittens Lend a Paw to AIDS Fight , LiveScience ContributorDate:." *Http://www.livescience.com*. TechMediaNetwork.com, 11 Sept. 2011. Web. 03 May 2012. <<http://www.livescience.com/15994-glow-dark-cats-aids-virus-research.html>>.

Chapter 3: Acting Upon Realization

Acknowledging the crime of my consumption and shortsightedness became a reality upon witnessing the waste generated by me on a daily basis: the paper I receive in the mail, the paper I use, and the paper that surrounds me in various overlooked forms. I considered the unnecessary paper used for advertising and packaging that most people can live without if not constantly assaulted by the media. This awakening prompted me to take action, and I put my name on a “no junk mail list”⁵ to eliminate a major source of waste in my life. I found remnants of my careless paper consumption around my home and decided to reuse it in my work. Having just begun to make art at that time, I felt fortunate to have this raw material at hand, and I began to make collages using my paper waste, because it seemed to be the most obvious and poetic way to resurrect what otherwise would have become trash.

These collages were made from materials that had been part of my life. This paper might have been important to me at some point, perhaps bearing the sentiment of a loved one, but most of it consisted of bills, forms, advertising, and bureaucratic by-products that I received in the mail. In addition to reusing and recycling my waste, the concept of utilizing a part of my life that I would have otherwise forgotten and discarded satisfied my desire to remember. This paper serves as a constant reminder of my consumer greed and as a prompt for moments past. I am detail-oriented, and these unplanned, process-based collages take months to make. One collage titled *Canadian Forms* (2010) took three months to complete, yet the immense satisfaction I experienced throughout its

⁵ http://www.directmail.com/directory/mail_preference/Default.aspx

creation was immeasurable. I embrace the process of making the collages more than the outcome; the process of making the work is a reward in itself and provides a catharsis for me, helping me to let go of the guilt I feel about my participation in consuming and discarding. Deconstructing and then reconstructing what otherwise would have been waste provides an opportunity for penance. My collages resemble mathematical fractal imagery, perhaps influenced by the Bachelor's degree in Science I earned in India. The fractals emulate the never-ending barrage of junk mail and paper that represent the destructive qualities of consumerism, its effects on the environment, and my part in it.

At first, my ornate collages seemed merely decorative, colorful and visually satisfying, and I re-examined my use of materials to make the work more physically and conceptually layered. As a result, I took the canvas off the wall and began making work in three dimensions. Still using waste paper, I began making sculptures that initially explored and experimented with the limits and possibilities of my primary material. I made the work from molds and casts of my body, and the paper functioned as the "skin" that covered them. Using my physical self in the work and the consumer by-products of my life heightens the metaphor of self-incrimination and my acceptance of guilt.

Instead of using paper in its original form, I reconstitute it by tearing, blending, pulping, and gluing it to make a cast-able material. I made casts of my face with this process to create my first sculpture titled *Totem of Shame* (2010). It is based on the Native American ritual of building totems that are "used for public ridicule, called shame poles, and were erected to shame individuals or groups for unpaid debts."⁶ By

⁶ "Meaning And Purpose Of Totem Poles." *TotemPole.net*. Webunet. Web. 18 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.totem-pole.net/meanings.html>>.

constructing a pole with my visage and using my waste paper, I publicly shamed myself and did penance for exhibiting greed and contributing to waste.

My second sculpture titled *If only....* (2010) is comprised of multiple molds of my hands, each of which splits into five others at the wrists to form ten gesturing hands. Using mesh as an armature that I covered in paper pulp, this piece was my reaction to an overwhelming semester and my futile desire to mutate and “grow” more hands in order to accomplish my demanding goals. It also comments on the genetic engineering trend. Doctor Stephen Badylak claimed to have created “Amazing Pixie Dust”⁷, a powder that could re-generate skin, bones and limbs. If true, this discovery would be nothing short of miraculous, but I have to question the ethical and political implications as well as the desire to play God.

These sculptures led me to chewing the waste paper into pulp and creating a nest-like structure for wasps. Using my body as a machine and mimicking actual wasps, I paid homage to the wasp’s nests that I remember destroying as a child. The guilt I feel for this act of destruction, as well as my constant guilt about greed and consumption, gave birth to this work titled *Regurgitate* (2010). This piece is also a comment on the control that technology has by turning people into obedient machines.

⁷ Hanlon, Michael. "The Amazing 'pixie Dust' Made from Pigs Bladder That Regrew a Severed Finger in FOUR Weeks." *Mail Online*. [Http://www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk), 02 May 2008. Web. 18 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-563099/The-amazing-pixie-dust-pigs-bladder-regrew-severed-finger-FOUR-weeks.html>>.

Chapter 4: A Never Ending Journey

Having made a body of work that stemmed from my guilty conscience and my need to rectify my wrongs, I began to look more closely at myself and at the relationship I shared with my other, artist-self. My guilt had been a driving force in a lot of my work. Even though I did not intend to destroy the environment, I realized that my actions became part of its demise, even if only by association. No matter how simple, my existence contributes to the constant consumption of my environment. Recalling *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka and Edgar's being a burden to his family, I realized that I was a burden to the planet, and my first reaction was to make sculptures that reflected my angst and inability to ameliorate this dilemma. My pieces *A Fly on Your Wall* (2011), "*Dream Weaver*" (2011) and "*Ever Watchful*" (2012) signaled the beginning of my journey of self discovery. I created insects from materials that were once part of my life and combined them with castings of my own body parts in order to fabricate hybrid amalgamations of myself. These creatures are recognizable at first glance, but, upon closer inspection, they reveal an uncomfortable and unsettling reality. These hybrid monsters seek to convey the same feeling of guilt I experienced when I realized my complicity in destroying the environment.

These insect hybrids also comment on the scientific sorcery that represents the art of contemporary culture. An example is E-coli, a deadly bacterium that is considered fatal and is used by pharmaceutical companies to manufacture large quantities of insulin

by “gene splicing”⁸. My work calls attention to this necessary potential evil that risks turning into a catastrophe. Such a scenario became a reality in March 2011 when a devastating Tsunami hit Japan and threatened to create a worldwide Radiation calamity due to the compromised integrity of its Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant .This is one example of something that humans created for good becoming a deadly and irreparable tragedy. Although triggered by a natural disaster, the damage alludes to the unbridled power of humanity.

⁸ Answered by Discovery Channel. "What Are Some Important Uses of Genetic Engineering?"*Http://curiosity.discovery.com/*. Copyright © 2011 Discovery Communications, LLC. The Number-one Nonfiction Media Company. Web. 3 May 2012.
<<http://curiosity.discovery.com/topic/genetic-engineering/page/5>>.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

My never-ending journey of seeking and bringing to light the possibility of accidental or intentional misuse as a result of humanity's eternal quest for power is worth the effort. Making work that reminds people of their participation in the great scheme of life and its potential destruction is my goal.

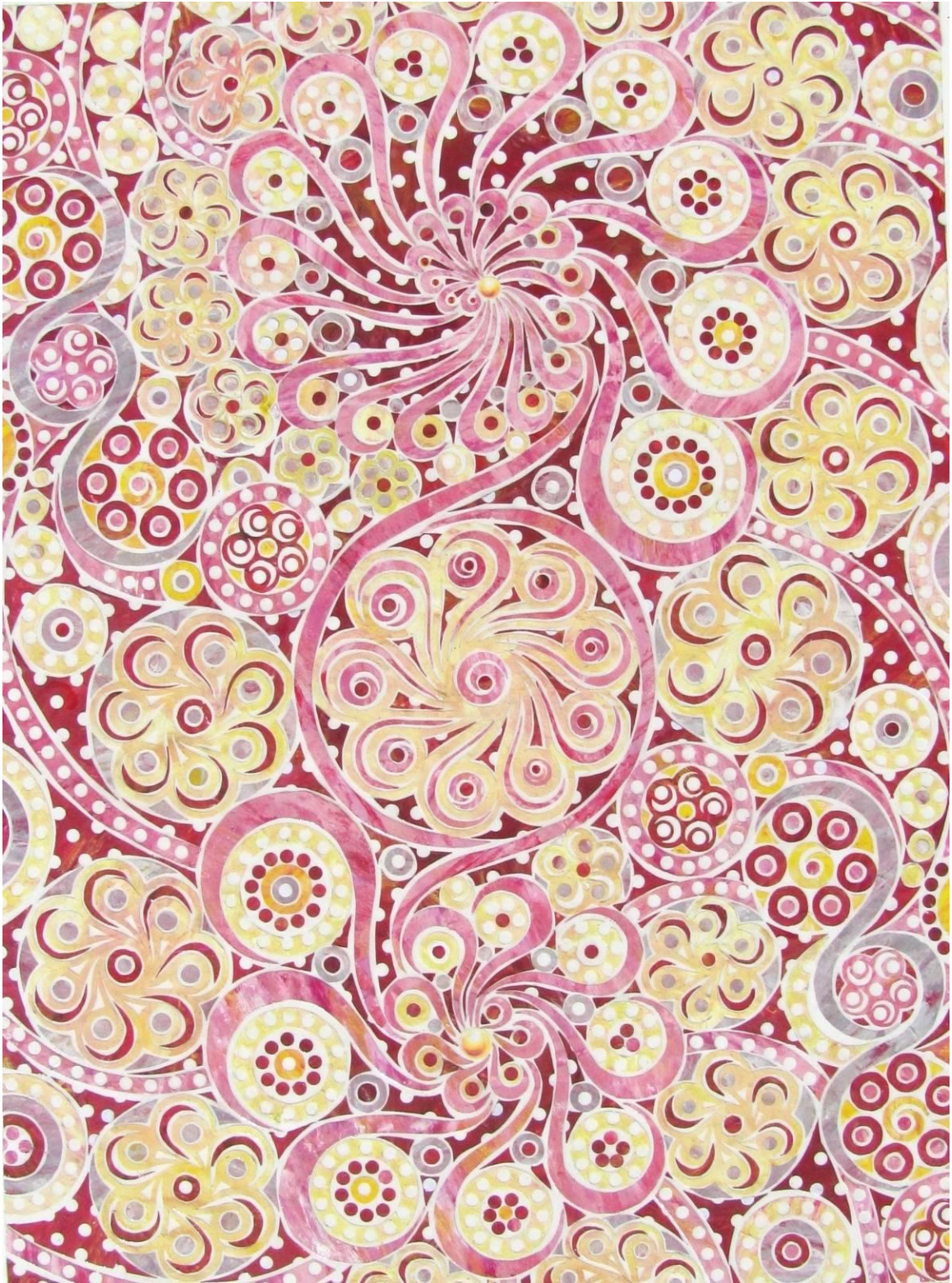
References

- ¹ "Non-power Uses of Nuclear Energy." *World Nuclear Association*. Web. 03 May 2012. <<http://www.world-nuclear.org>>.
- ² "Reducing the Price of HIV/AIDS Treatment." *Www.avert.org* Is Copyright © AVERT, 2011. Web. 03 May 2012. <<http://www.avert.org/generic.htm>>.
- ³ "Artificial Liver 'could Be Grown'" *Http://news.bbc.co.uk*. 25 Apr. 2002. Web. 03 May 2012. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/1949073.stm>>.
- ⁴ Choi, Charles. "Glow-in-the-Dark Kittens Lend a Paw to AIDS Fight, Live Science Contributor Date:." *Http://www.livescience.com*. TechMediaNetwork.com, 11 Sept. 2011. Web. 03 May 2012. <<http://www.livescience.com/15994-glow-dark-cats-aids-virus-research.html>>.
- ⁵ http://www.directmail.com/directory/mail_preference/Default.aspx
- ⁶ "Meaning And Purpose Of Totem Poles." *TotemPole.net*. Webunet. Web. 18 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.totem-pole.net/meanings.html>>.
- ⁷ Hanlon, Michael. "The Amazing 'pixie Dust' Made from Pigs Bladder That Regrew a Severed Finger in FOUR Weeks." *Mail Online*. *Http://www.dailymail.co.uk*, 02 May 2008. Web. 18 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-563099/The-amazing-pixie-dust-pigs-bladder-regrew-severed-finger-FOUR-weeks.html>>.
- ⁸ Answered by Discovery Channel. "What Are Some Important Uses of Genetic Engineering?" *Http://curiosity.discovery.com/*. Copyright © 2011 Discovery Communications, LLC. The Number-one Nonfiction Media Company. Web. 3 May 2012. <<http://curiosity.discovery.com/topic/genetic-engineering/page/5>>.

Appendix
Image List

- 01: *In the Pink of Health*. Collage on clay-board, 18 x 24 inches, 2010
- 02: *Pollination*. Collage on canvas, 30 x 40 inches, 2010
- 03: *Canadian forms*. Collage on canvas, 30 x 40 inches, 2010
- 04: *Interference*. Collage on BFK paper, 22 x 30 inches, 2010
- 05: *Totem of Shame*. Paper pulp and glue, 20 x 75 x 20 inches, 2011
- 06: *If only.....* Paper pulp on wire mesh, 32 x 26 x 11½ inches, 2011
- 07: *Regurgitate*. Chewed paper, 4½ x 8 x 7 inches, 2011
- 08: *Peel*. Paper, Elmer glue and acrylic, 13 x 30½ x 8 inches, 2011
- 09: *Guttural*. Mixed media, 11½ x 25 x 9½ inches, 2011
- 10: *Fistful of Promises*. Paper, acrylic and polymer clay, 30 x 34 x 13 inches, 2011
- 11: *Fly on Your Wall*. Mixed media, 8½ x 10½ x 3¼ inches, 2011
- 12: *Dream Weaver*. Mixed media, 10½ x 11¾ x 5 inches, 2011
- 13: *Ever Watchful*. Mixed media, 18 x 22x 8 inches, 2012
- 14: *Wound Up*. Paper, and acrylic, 16¾ x 25 x 10½ inches, 2012

01: *In the Pink of Health*. Collage on clay-board, 18 x 24 inches, 2010



02: *Pollination*. Collage on canvas, 30 x 40 inches, 2010



03: *Canadian forms*. Collage on canvas, 30 x 40 inches, 2010



04: *Interference*. Collage on BFK paper, 22 x 30 inches, 2010



05: *Totem of Shame*. Paper pulp and glue, 20 x 75 x 20 inches, 2011



06: *If only.....* Paper pulp on wire mesh, 32 x 26 x 11½ inches, 2011



07: *Regurgitate*. Chewed paper, 4½ x 8 x 7 inches, 2011



08: *Peel*. Paper, Elmer glue and acrylic, 13 x 30½ x 8 inches, 2011



09: *Guttural*. Mixed media, 11½ x 25 x 9½ inches, 2011



10: *Fistful of Promises*. Paper, acrylic and polymer clay, 30 x 34 x 13 inches, 2011



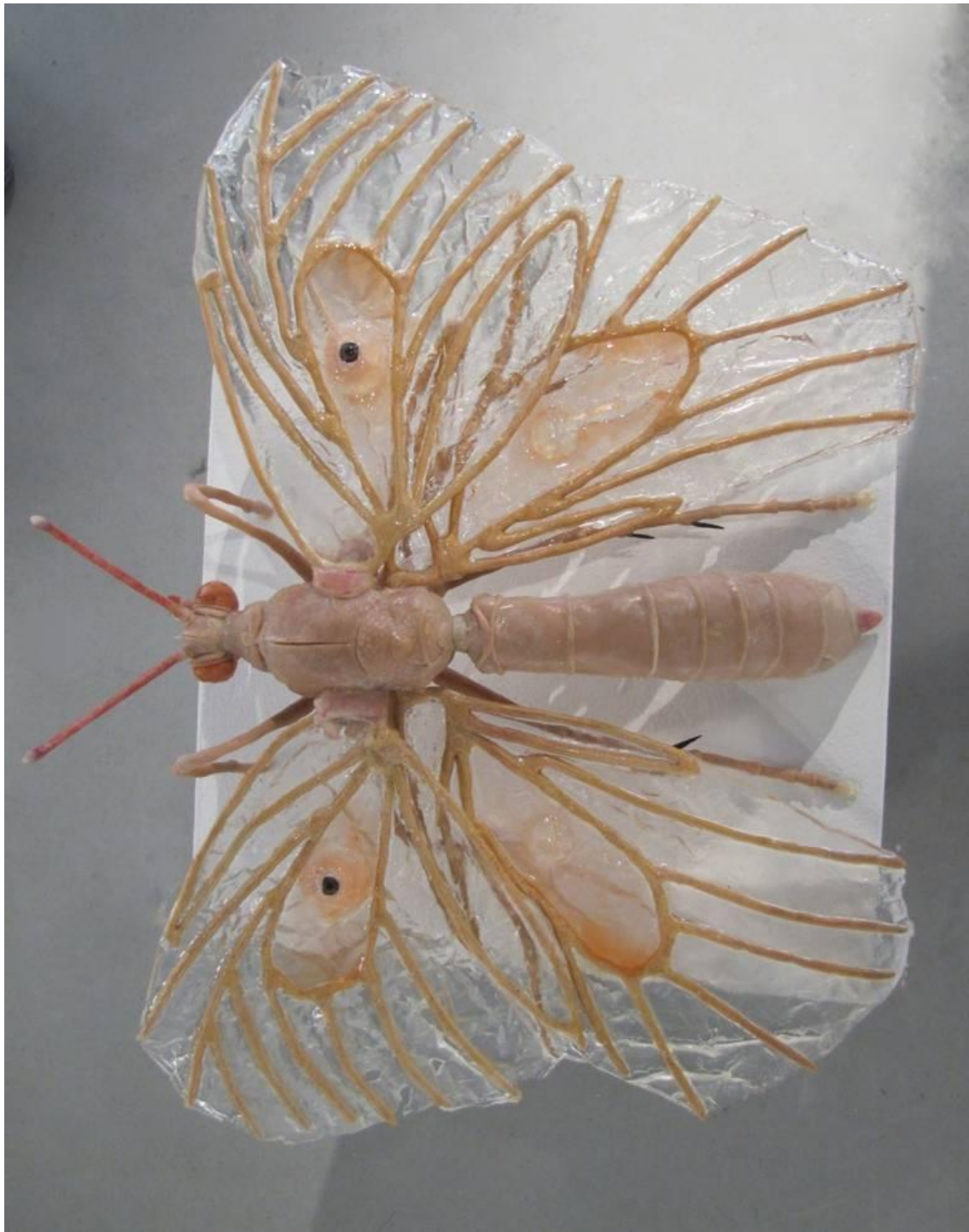
11: *Fly on Your Wall*. Mixed media, 8½ x 10½ x 3¼ inches, 2011



12: *Dream Weaver*. Mixed media, 10½ x 11¾ x 5 inches, 2011



13: *Ever Watchful*. Mixed media, 18 x 22x 8 inches, 2012



14: *Wound Up*. Paper, and acrylic, 16¾ x 25 x 10½ inches, 2012

