

From the point of view of the metropolis, nature seems to be missing. There is too little green, too few wild animals, too little biodiversity. And indeed, in an era of mass extinction and monoculture, much is missing from both the city and the country. The view of nature as what is missing, however, is at odds with the persistent experience of plenitude in the rural setting. Life is everywhere on the farm: buzzing, feeding, growing, shitting, squawking and dying.

This exhibition is a “work in progress” from *Horror Vacui* (Nature abhors a vacuum. What do we make of its plenitude?): Project for Westbrook Artists' Site (WAS). *Horror Vacui* seeks to respond to this question in both of its senses: 1) How do we conceptualize what we find in WAS pond—in relation to the history of the WAS site, postindustrial landscapes, species migration, cultural lore and sensory experience? and 2) What do we make in material terms in order to fully conceptualize what we find and, in response, to act appropriately, ethically, ecologically, as designers and artists and as human animals.

The project vector is the population of American bullfrogs, *Rana Catesbeiana*, residing in the pond at WAS. The pond, man-made more than thirty years ago for fishing and swimming, was once stocked with bluegill, smallmouth bass and channel catfish. It is now densely—shockingly—populated with bullfrogs. The bullfrog, like so many others—including us—is a migrant from elsewhere that has flourished in its new environment and so is a perfect symbol of nature's plenitude in the postindustrial farm: It is at once a sign of the land's persistent fecundity and an infestation, a wild animal and an escaped food source, a source of delight and a scourge that eats everything in sight. Nature abhors a vacuum. What do we make of its plenitude?

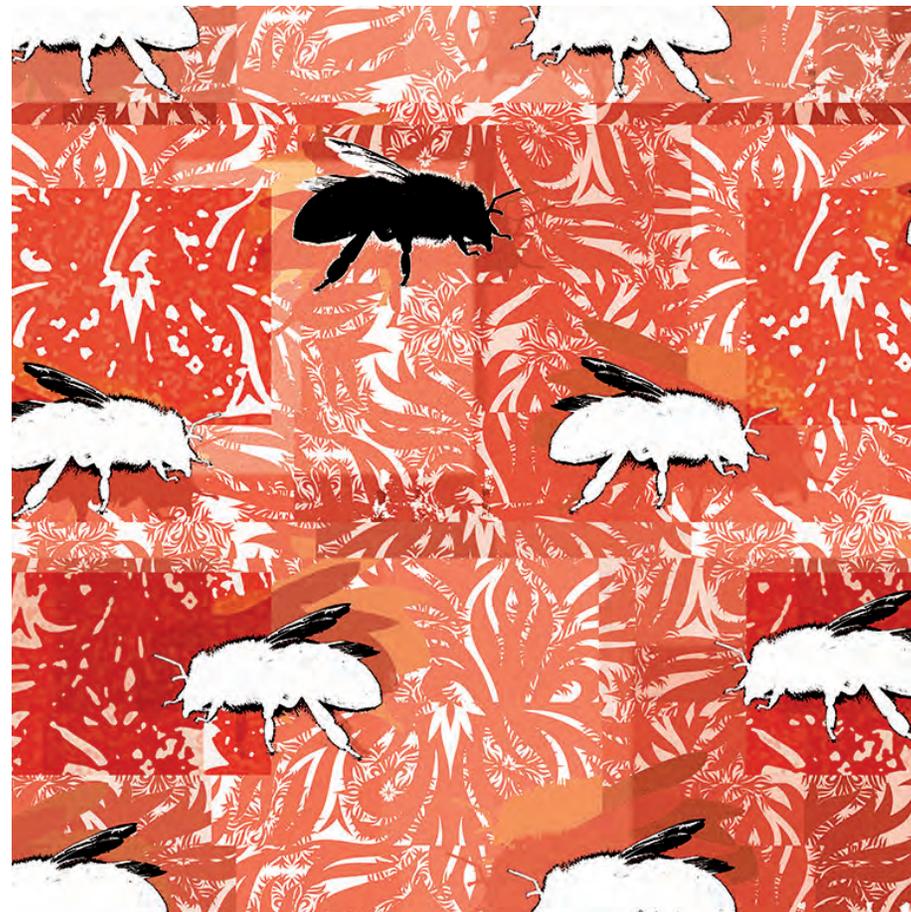
One response to this plenitude is to share it at a dinner party, a dinner party to which all who may enjoy the bounty are invited. The plan positions humans alongside non-humans without privilege and explores eating across the nature/culture divide. Host and guests alike share the desire to consume sustenance. The bullfrogs' omnivorous behavior matches our own and their habit of cannibalism underscores the dissolving boundaries between eating and being eaten. Such a realization opens us to the possibility that we need to dehumanize in order to more fully humanize our attitudes and actions toward the environment.

Westbrook Artists' Site (WAS)

K. Lair, E. Walden

W A S  
WESTBROOK ARTISTS' SITE

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(detail) - *Horror Vacui* The Dinner Party with Honeybee Field

***Horror Vacui*** (Nature abhors a vacuum.

What do we make of its plenitude?):

*Work in Progress* for Westbrook Artists' Site (WAS)

featuring **Kevin Lair and Elizabeth Walden**

September 29 to October 21, 2013

Iowa State University College of Design

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