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Unconventional ways to impress at the Craft and Folk Art Museum

Jennifer Angus uses insects in her work and Ann Weber cardboard in her sculpture.

By Scarlet Cheng, Special to the Los Angeles Times

Two shows at the Craft and Folk Art Museum (through Sept. 11) demonstrate how artists can work their magic to make unconventional materials impressive and expressive.

Walking into Jennifer Angus' installation "All Creatures Great and Small" is a bit startling, as one realizes the wee components of her work. Insects. About 5,000 of them, pinned to the wall in patterns and posing in display cases. They're in glorious jewel-like colors and obsidian sheens, in the shapes of leaves and in shapes not seen in nature.

The introductory mural depicts a large human skull, made up of *Eupholus* weevils, from which a swarm of white-winged cicadas emanate. "I set up situations that are provocative," Angus says by phone from Madison, Wis., where she teaches textile design at the University of Wisconsin. "There's a narrative in my head, but I'm interested in what other people see in them."

Angus plays on ideas of mortality and Victorian keepsakes, as well as human foibles reflected to us by another species. The upper part of the gallery walls is dotted with glass bubbles within which Angus has put her "hybrids" — insects reconstituted with extra wings and conjoined bodies. Around each bubble is an arrangement made with beeswax cast into flower blossoms, to mimic, she says, memento wreaths Victorians would make and display at home.

The free-standing showcases contain elaborate scenes created with dollhouses and ... more insects. In the church scene, insects are perched on pews within, while a funeral is taking place without, the mourners in procession toward a casket. Crawling up the belfry is a large rhino beetle with a tiny set of keys — "That's Quasimodo with the keys," Angus says dryly.

Ann Weber works in bigger-than-life scale. Her biomorphic sculpture in the exhibition "Love and Other Audacities" are made of ... cardboard. Cardboard finished with shellac, and mostly in shades of beige and brown, and sometimes white and sometimes with splashes of color. Weber stumbled upon the idea when she moved and found herself with a surfeit of card-



Ann Weber: Love and Other Audacities — Prose & Kahn. At the Craft and Folk Art Museum (Scarlet Cheng / For The Los Angeles Times)

board boxes. She'd been searching for a material that would be cheap, readily available and workable.

Twenty years later, she's mastered flattening boxes and cutting them up into strips with a hand-held blade. Then she staples them together into shapes formed by hand — a nod, she admits, to the coil-building of pottery. (She had been a potter and studied under Viola Frey in San Francisco.) "It's a huge homage to the craft world," says Weber, who is based in Emeryville, Calif. "For me craft is not a dirty word. Craft and art are inextricably linked."

Scouring dumpsters for cardboard, she finds herself more aligned with the philosophies of the Italian Art Povera movement than with recycled or found art. Her groupings often have tongue-in-cheek titles — "Curioser and Curioser," "Prose & Kahn," and "She I & She II" who form a lesbian couple in "Wonderland."