

**MEDIA RELEASE**

Contact: Aki Martin  
P: 619.238.7559 x203  
F: 619.238.8777  
E: martin@mopa.org  
www.mopa.org

**MoPA Presents  
*Jo Whaley: Theater of Insects***

May 16 - September 27, 2009

**(San Diego, CA) – For Immediate Release**

**EVENT SUMMARY:**

The Museum of Photographic Arts (MoPA) in Balboa Park is pleased to present *Jo Whaley: Theater of Insects* on view May 16, 2009 through September 27, 2009. This exhibition includes approximately 40 photographs, along with a selection of insect cases and glassed archaeology trays, and examines the connection between art and science.

This exhibition will run concurrently with *Picturing the Process: Exploring the Art and Science of Photography* on view through July 25, 2009, and *Ansel Adams: A Life's Work* on view May 23 - October 4, 2009.

**EXHIBITION DETAILS:**

Jo Whaley's photographs show mesmerizing scenes with vibrantly colored insects, artfully placed against weathered, manmade backgrounds. The result is a compelling marriage of the natural and artificial, science and art.

While the specimens in Jo Whaley's images are real, the backgrounds are fabricated, often inspired by the old dioramas found in museums. By creating carefully crafted, theatrically staged sets, Whaley invites the viewer to engage with the actors—in this case, insects—allowing their beauty to be seen in unexpected ways.

The constructed sets are composed of cast-off materials from urban production, which have partially been reclaimed by nature, such as metal that is rusted, paper that is foxed by microorganisms and plastic pitted by the sea. The specimens are depicted not in their actual size, but rather their scale is large, approximately the size of a

human head. The viewer thus confronts the insect on a one to one relationship, as equals, calling into question man's perceived dominance over nature.

Whaley calls her creation "photographs of narrative fiction." They have antecedents in scientific illustration that go back to the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At that time, a new approach to science emerged that relied on experimentation and direct observation of nature rather than on ancient knowledge. While the more than a century and a half since the invention of photography has seen a growing separation between art and science, Jo Whaley's work in *Theater of Insects* takes us back to a time when art and science were not separate.

In her publication, *The Theater of Insects*, Whaley says, "Art and science are not so diametrically opposed. The practice of both begins with the intense observation of nature, which in turn sparks the imagination toward action. Just pause long enough to look."

**ARTIST INFORMATION:**

Jo Whaley has lifelong roots in the San Francisco Bay Area, having earned advanced degrees in Art and Photography from the University of California, Berkeley by 1980. Whaley originally studied to become a painter, putting her abilities to work as a scenic artist for the San Francisco Opera and other Bay Area theatrical companies. Her theater experience openly informs her photography, in which she creates stage sets and employs numerous props, painted backdrops and dramatic lighting. All of her photographic series fuse the language of photography with the language of painting and rely on an expressive use of color.

Whaley works in discreet series, the subject matter of her photographs over the last 25 years have ranged from allegorical nudes, to a revision of the "vanitas" still life tradition, to a fusion of natural history and environmental issues in the Entomology Portfolio of insects. The compelling issue, that has driven her work, is the interface between nature and urban technological culture. With an ironic and quirky point of view, she juxtaposes organic and manmade elements to reflect the issue of environmental degradation in an imaginative manner.

Since the early 1980's Whaley's photographs have been exhibited in the United States, Europe and Japan. Between 1989 and 1993 Whaley received numerous grants to work with the Polaroid 20x24 camera in New York and received one of the last National Endowment Visual Artists Fellowships in 1994. She taught at various Universities from

1983-2003. She is married to the photographer Greg Mac Gregor and they divide their time between Santa Fe, New Mexico and Oakland, California.

### **Press Opportunities**

Exhibition and installation images are available for press reproduction in high resolution formats. Please contact Aki Martin, Marketing & Communications Manager at 619-238-7559, ext. 203 or via email ([martin@mopa.org](mailto:martin@mopa.org)) with any press-related needs.

### **MoPA Information**

The Museum of Photographic Arts (MoPA) is one of the few museums in the country devoted to photography, film and video. Since its founding in 1983, MoPA has been dedicated to collecting, preserving and exhibiting the entire spectrum of the photographic medium. The museum's endeavors consistently address cultural, historical and social issues through its exhibitions and public programs.

Visit [www.mopa.org](http://www.mopa.org) for information about exhibitions, programs and special events.

- **Hours:** Tuesday through Sunday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Closed Mondays.
- **Gallery admission:** \$6 adults; \$4 students, seniors and military; FREE to members and children under 12. Admission is free to the public on the second Tuesday of the month.
- **Docent Tours** for student groups (elementary through college) are available free of charge with advance reservations. Tours for non-students are also available, with advance reservations, at a discounted admission rate.

The Museum of Photographic Arts is accredited by the **American Association of Museums** and is a member-supported, private, non-profit institution. Additional support for museum programs is provided in part by the **City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture, the Joan and Irwin Jacobs Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation, the Weingart-Price Fund, the San Diego Foundation, Patrons of the Prado, and the National Endowment for the Arts.**

**# # #**