Insects and Colours between Art and Natural History (online, 29-30 Nov 21)

Online, Nov 29–30, 2021

V.E. Mandrij and Giulia Simonini

This two-day online workshop addresses the issue of recording colours in entomology during the 17th and 18th centuries.

Because of the bewildering variety of insect colours, artists and naturalists had difficulty describing and reproducing them with pigments. Some early modern scholars disapproved of using colours to depict insects in entomological illustrations. Other naturalists instead collaborated with artists to document the colours and shapes of insects.

Centuries later, this cooperation continues. Although irrelevant for the study of their anatomy, colour was significant for the identification of different species. However, artists and naturalists had different ways of tackling the problem of recording the appearances and names of the chromatic variety that exists in the insect world. Despite the variety of approaches and techniques used or proposed to record the colours of insects, this issue has not received the scholarly attention it deserves.

This workshop investigates the relationship between colours and insect images and aims to answer questions such as: Why in entomology, more than in any other discipline, were so many different approaches developed to address the problem of recording colours? Why did painters and scholars not agree on one unique method? To what extent did their subjectivity play a role in their choice of approach?

Speakers from several fields will discuss the topic of recording the colours of insects in art and natural history. They will touch on topics such as the significance of entomology in the development of colour standardization practices, new artistic techniques (such as lepidochromy) and optical theories.

To attend the online workshop and receive the zoom-link, please register by emailing the organisers Giulia Simonini (giulia.simonini[at]tu-berlin.de) and V.E. Mandrij (v.e.mandrij[at]uni-konstanz.de). The maximum number of participants is 40.

PROGRAMME

Day 1 | 29 Nov. 2021 | 14:00-18:45 (CET)
14:00 Zoom room opens

14:15-14:45 Introduction of the workshop

14:15-14:45
Giulia Simonini (she) & V.E. Mandrij (they):
Opening Presentation: Translating Natural Colours of Insects

14:45-15:00 Discussion

15:00-15:10 Break

15:10-17:10 | First Panel: Depicting Insects & Colouring Practices
Panellist: Florike Egmond

15:15-15:35
Erma Hermens:
Painting Insects in 17th-century Netherlands: Written Instruction and Practice

15:35-15:50 Discussion

15:55-16:15
Giulia Simonini:
Painting by Numbers and Entomology

16:15-16:30 Discussion

16:35-16:55
Prof. Beth Tobin:
Colouring Drawings of Insects at Home and Abroad

16:55-17:10 Discussion

17:10-17:20 Break

17:20-18:10 | Final Panel 1: Colours of Insects
Panellist: Hanneke Grootenboer

17:25-17:45
Kay Etheridge:
The Biology of Colour

17:45-18:00 Discussion

18:00-18:10 Break

18:10-18:45 Aperitivo

Day 2 | 30 Nov. 2021 | 14:00-19:00 (CET)
14:00 Zoom room opens

14:05-15:25 | Second Panel: Entomologists and Colours
Panellist: Friedrich Steinle

14:10-14:30
Katharina Schmidt-Loske:
Observation and Depiction – Maria Sibylla Merian’s Individual Style of Drawing Insects and Plants

14:30-14:45 Discussion

14:50-15:10
Stefanie Jovanovic-Kruspel:
The Somber & Opaque Colors of Butterflies – Schiffermüller and His Attempt of a Colour System

15:10-15:25 Discussion

15:25-15:35 Break

15:35-16:55 | Third Panel: Lepidochromy
Panellist: Karin Leonhard

15:40-16:00
V.E. Mandrij:
'Butterflies Truer-to-nature than Paintings’. Colours in Lepidochromy Technique

16:00-16:15 Discussion

16:20-16:40
Grace Touzel:
Lepidochromy at the Natural History Museum (London): Butterfly Wings as a Printing Medium

16:40-16:55 Discussion

16:55-17:05 Break

17:05-17:45 Final Panel 2: Colours of Insects
Panellist: Hossein Rajaei

17:10-17:30
Brian Ogilvie:
Catching the Rainbow: Iridescent Insects Before Iridescence

17:30-17:45 Discussion

17:45-18:00 Break

18:00-19:00 Final Discussion with Dominik Hünniger

Reference:
CONF: Insects and Colours between Art and Natural History (online, 29-30 Nov 21). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 9, 2021 (accessed Nov 16, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/35302>.