

## Foreword

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From its beginnings, humanity has lived intensely with the insects, which are prevailing forms of life in the terrestrial environment, comprising four-fifths of all of the animals on the earth, with more than one million species. Relations of good and evil, established over millennia with these small or even minute animals, are duly enshrined in stereotyped symbols in the imaginary of the Christian West in the centuries preceding the Industrial Revolution. Representations of beetles, butterflies, dragonflies, bees and flies, although very frequent in the artistic expressions of all time and civilizations, have been sparingly recorded and considered in studies of the image. When properly evaluated, such small iconographic details<sup>2</sup> bring to the surface much of the knowledge and imagery of the humanity of yesterday and even today. The proposed interdisciplinary dossier “Insects, Art and Science in the Modern and Contemporary Ages”, in which Zoology joins the History of Art, intends to highlight the importance of these small animals in the western iconography and demonstrate the potential of their proper consideration. The omnipresence of these “miraculous reductions of the mystery and magic of grand divine design”<sup>3</sup> will be treated here conceptually in analogy with the notions of micro- and macrocosm, in which the detail holds a key to the understanding of the whole.

This dossier consists of six articles that clearly exemplify the different views on the representation of these animals, from the simple record to the formalized treatment of deep iconographic issues, where their presence, usually ignored, can makes us reconsider well-established academic

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<sup>2</sup> In this context, the insect that has received the most attention is the fly (see: ARASSE, Daniel. **Le Détail: pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture**. Flammarion, Paris, 2008, p. 120).

<sup>3</sup> As considered by: EISLER, Colin. **Dürer’s animals**. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1991, p. 119.

concepts. The sequential disposition of the articles follows the chronological order of the production to which it refers, covering works produced between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The article by Alcimar Carvalho and Inácio Rebetez (“Moth of Venus, caterpillar of Christ: Piero di Cosimo’s insects and their possible meanings”) provides a careful survey of the various insects represented in the paintings of the master of the Florentine Renaissance Piero di Cosimo, exploring the possible meanings that each insect species can assume within the iconographic context. The paper by Laura García (“Las abejas como elemento heráldico: El escudo de armas de Urbano VIII y su propagación artística por Roma”) records representations of bees arranged in triad in sculptural and pictorial works that refer to heraldry of Pope Urban VIII and discusses their symbolism. Based on an analysis of the representation and distribution of wasps and other elements in still lifes of the Dutch Golden Age, the article by Hugo Moleiro and Alcimar Carvalho (“Representações de vespas nas naturezas-mortas dos Países Baixos entre 1600 e 1715: Registro, biologia e simbolismo”) reaffirms the mimetic condition of that production, where these fiery insects would represent, from the Christian point of view, the punishment of sinners. Nelson Papavero (“Representações do besouro *Acrocinus Longimanus* (Linnaeus, 1758) por artistas e naturalistas dos séculos XVII e XVIII”) records the first illustrations of the harlequin beetle, a New World insect of curious morphology that seems to have amazed European travelers. Ana Maria Costa and collaborators (“*Lepidoptera Fluminensis* – “obra tão rara e estimável”: Um tesouro real da História Natural do Brasil”) offer us the first essay on a very rich Brazilian-Portuguese manuscript of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, in which images of butterflies from Rio de Janeiro were produced from the direct transfer of the wing scales of the specimens to paper surfaces. At the end of the dossier, Johannis Tsoumas’s article (“Insects in Japanese culture: influences on the fin de siècle glass and jewelry design”) demonstrates how much the fad of representing insects on decorative objects during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and North America is based on an appropriation of elements from the Japanese

culture, a process that contributed to the very structuring of the concept of modernity in art.

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