

# TEN MILLIMETERS

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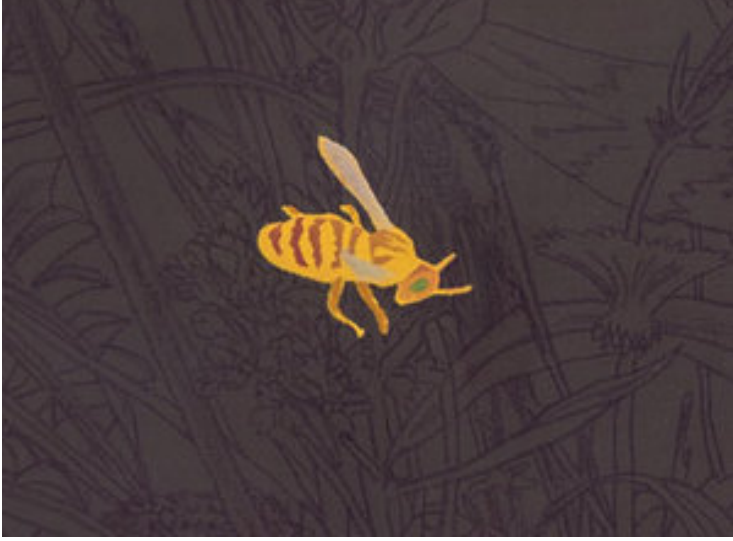
# The play's the thing...

Written by Jori Sackin

Photo by EG Schempf

Last spring my wife, Laura, noticed a spider had built a web in-between the driver's side mirror and the window of her truck. Each morning she would start the engine and watch the spider scurry inside the mirror. As she drove, the web would flutter in the wind and then eventually cave in and fly off into traffic. At night when the engine was quiet and the lights were low, the spider would come out and rebuild its web. This went on for a few weeks. Each morning the spider would crawl into the mirror before the web was destroyed and each night it would sneak out and rebuild it while we were sleeping in our beds. One morning as Laura prepared to go to work she noticed the web was there but the spider was gone. She peered inside the tiny bit of space that runs along the edges of her driver's side mirror and saw a crumpled up spider body lying inside.

If you look at this story through a certain lens, this is a tragic tale of meaninglessness. The spider works each night to accomplish a task that's destroyed in the morning. Its basic survival instincts, to guide itself toward food, to build a web so it can catch bugs, even this simple task is beyond its ability. It is doubly meaningless because we can observe it and see how much of life it's missing out on, how little it gets to experience of the world. It lives for a brief while, trying and failing to eat, not ever being able to understand things such as love, and possibly more important "truck". For all it knows the entire universe is made up entirely of a driver's side mirror of a 2007 GMC Colorado.



It's then no great stretch of the imagination to apply this same lens to our own lives, to look at the world we scurry through, thinking all the while that we have an understanding of how things work, when in fact, there might be a whole dimension of reality that we are also completely missing, that we

might also be living in the experiential equivalent of a driver's side mirror of a 2007 GMC Colorado.

Being able to take these macro views, looking at pictures of the universe, gazing at the ocean, we often feel our smallness in relation to what we sometimes refer to as "the world". We think of ourselves as actors in a vast expanse of space that "acts" as a backdrop for us to go about and perform. This sense of being an actor in a environment is marked through with a bright yellow highlighter in "Great Piece of Prairie" by Michael Krueger (Haw Contemporary). The bees in the painting pop out at you, glowing with a brightness that at first makes you not even notice the background they sit in. The bee's want to be noticed. They are trying to be noticed. They are the audience craving actors busily flying about, trying to make things happen.

The understated background is not trying. It is not immediately wanting to be noticed. It is just there, and at first glance, it seems passive, shy and unassuming.

But as you look closer, you notice the subtle purple lines on the flat grey surface start to do something. The bees that once seemed so illuminating, now seem distracting. The growing power of the faint purple outlines of the flowers, of the tall grasses takes you over in a strange hypnotic trance. It makes you feel the physical disconnect between these small characters that we ascribe so much attention to and the seemingly passive world that they inhabit.

The heightened separation between



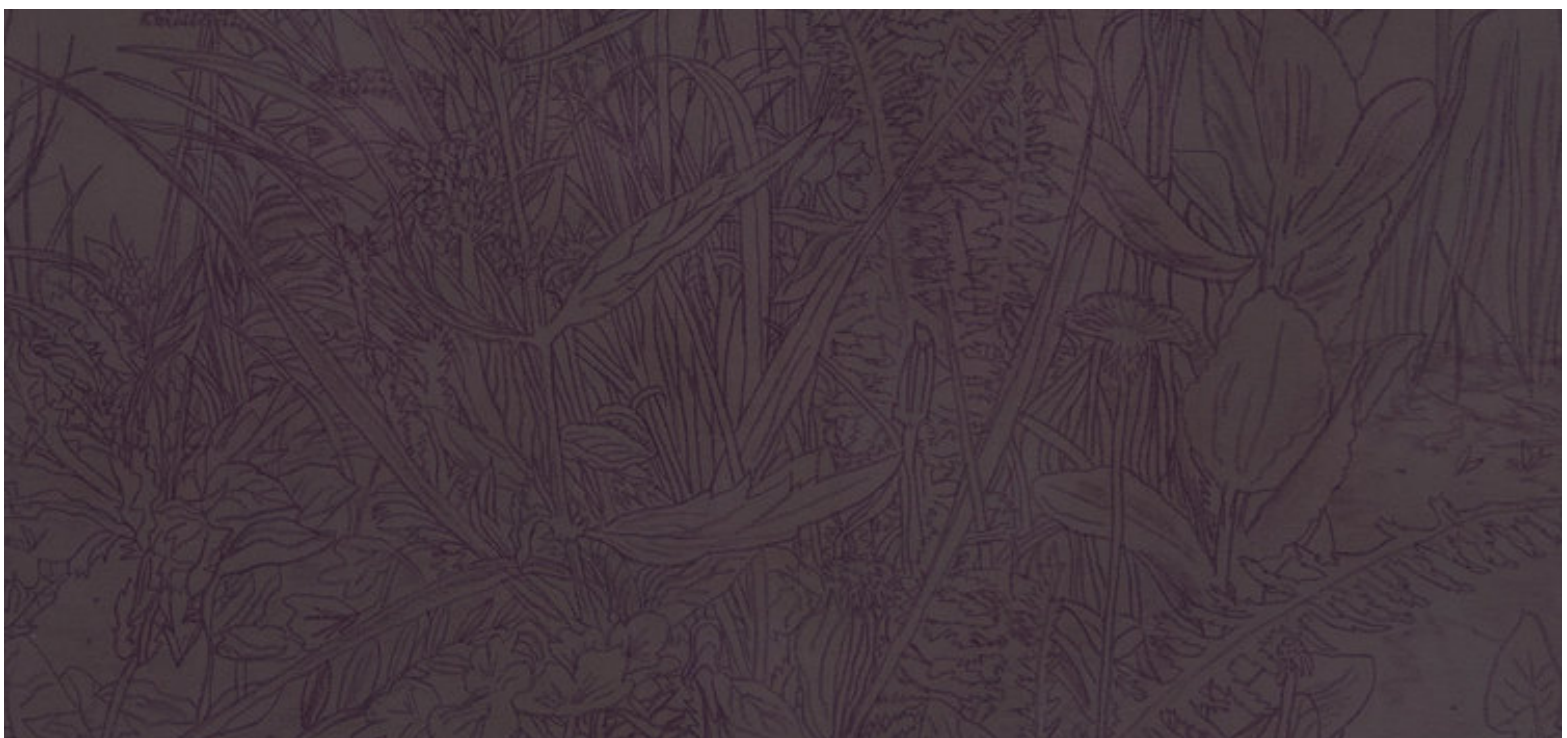
what might be thought of as the characters of the painting (the bees) and the background (the plants) is a visual problem that your eyes try to solve, but cannot. You want the two to come together, but they stubbornly



refuse to exist on the same plane. This physical discomfort, of not being able to place "the actor" sufficiently on "its stage" is the embodied experience, the presence, of this piece. It calls attention to the fact that there is a fundamental misunderstanding in this way of thinking, that there is something wrong with the idea that we are characters that just happen to be moving through this space we call "our environment".

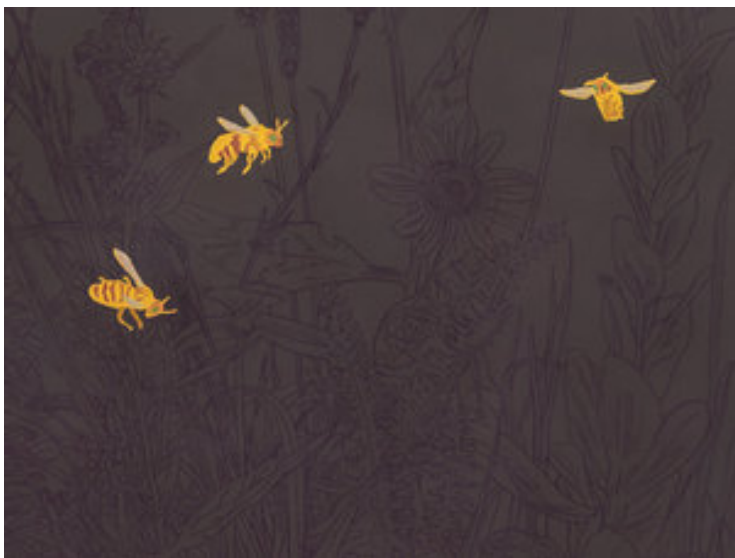
Bees make honey and then they die. Spiders build webs and then they die.

Human beings fall in love, have careers, make babies, grow old and die. All of these examples are centered around identifying a subject (bees, spiders, humans) and then describing the action they perform in the world (making honey, building webs, falling in love). What's missing is the fact that they are all doing these things "in" something. In Michael Krueger's work the backdrop is center stage. That thing we imagine ourselves moving through becomes the pulsating actor. The purple lines of the flowers moves and shift with a vibrating intensity and the bees stop frozen in a flat yellow space.





"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players," or so says William Shakespeare. It could also be said that "The world is a play and we are all tiny stages, where parts of the world take place" or "We are the play. We are the actors. We are the stage". Tragedy is believing in the Shakespearean quote, believing that we are solitary actors in solitary plays that just happen to be on the same stage. This is the tragic vision of the spider, and it is the tragic vision of our own lives, in which we imagine ourselves stuck in a driver's side mirror of a GMC Colorado floating somewhere alone in the universe, having neither the power nor the understanding to be able to effect any meaningful change on the massive movements of human civilization that swirl around us.



We are not doomed to this vision though. We have at least two lenses, two ways of perceiving our place within the world. In one, we see ourselves as the single Shakespearean character in a single play with an insignificant role in the larger drama, and with the other

we see ourselves as the backdrop, the set pieces, the space in which all the actors move. Each lens is quite useful in its own respect, but it's always better having a few extra lenses in your pocket, then clinging to just one. It is much better to be able to feel the tragic loss of this singular vision of the world AND be able to see ourselves as the play itself. In "Great Piece of Prairie" we can experience the physicality of what it is like to make this separation between the subject and its environment. We can feel the immediacy with which we are drawn to the glowing

singularity of the bees, and then, after some time, we can experience the gradual flowering of the background's subtle power that transfixes and confounds our vision of the play which we are currently taking part.



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