

“LEPIDOPTERA PORTRAITS”

“LEPIDOPTERA PORTRAITS”, is a project about the ways of looking at butterflies and moths in a broader than just natural history context, as their own “culture” and social infrastructure. In this series butterflies and moths are shown using the means and aesthetics that are normally used photographing portraits of people. The basic approach is a neutral background and studio lighting in a miniature studio custom designed for these small scale models. This body of work explores the facial expressions and emotions of these subjects and the viewers response to seeing these insects in this unusually “humanlike” context.

Photography as a medium makes it possible to see tiny objects magnified beyond what bare human eye can see. The faces of the butterflies and moths, in these portraits are considerably larger than life size. This presentation creates an encounter, where the viewer can examine the expressions and the appearance of the individuals in a modified scale, that is not possible in real life.

Anthropomorphism is a concept which describes the tendency to project human emotions onto animal behavior. It is tempting to interpret the expressions in these portraits using the scale and approach of human emotions. What kind of emotions can the facial expressions and gestures in these portraits express? Is there any similarities or just differences? Some of the images in this series are exploring the different mechanisms the butterflies communicate and the way they sense the world. Microscopic images of butterflies hands, feet, eyes and tongues give the viewer a detailed visual reference point. The expressions seem to say that the subjects of these photographs are alive, while the more or less subtle clues, such as presence of a pin piercing through the specimen, may suggest otherwise.

Most specimens used for this body of work are from a collection of butterflies and moths that I collected at age 12. The dusty boxes were preserved over the years and later found a new life in the context of this body of work. Some of the specimen have been collected later on, found dead by the side of the road after hitting a passing car or collected, deceased, from various locations.

The most images in the series are individual portraits, some are pictures of couples and group portraits. Another way I created “portraits” was getting inside the subjects heads by creating microscopic images of the light transmitted through the surface of the butterfly’s eyes. The process of shooting these portraits of the fragile specimen is destructive. Frail subjects lose their antennas, wings and finally start to fall completely apart due to excessive heat and handling during the shoot, only the images remain...