Hide and Seek – Things Are Not What They Seem

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ACQUISITIONS/HIDE AND SEEK – THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM

Hide and Seek – Things Are Not What They Seem

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The work *Hide & Seek – Things Are Not What They Seem* (Figs. 1–2) consists of a large, hand-knotted rug made up of smaller parts. Its design is a pattern created with inspiration from cicadas, in particular their wings. On some pieces of the rug, three-dimensional cicadas have landed in the shape of brooches. Each square of the rug is also a work in its own right. The lower left-hand corner is the part which the Bengt Julin Fund of the Friends of the Nationalmuseum has generously donated to the Museum’s collections.

The work was created in collaboration between the designer Anna Forsberg and the jewellery artist Märta Mattsson, both of them active in Sweden. Their starting point was a shared interest in insects. Anna Forsberg has had a fascination with their shapes, colours and geometrical patterns, while Märta Mattsson’s work springs from a personal phobia about insects and an attempt to overcome it. Both have worked with a variety of insects, but cicadas, in particular, had provided them with inspiration for rugs and jewellery, respectively, even before they embarked on this joint project. It was therefore a natural next step to create a collaborative work with the cicada as its point of intersection. They began work on *Hide & Seek – Things Are Not What They Seem* in spring 2016, and it was completed a year later.

The process evolved into a continuous exchange between the artists, working in...
Brooches can go out and about and be worn by someone for a while, before “landing” in their place on the rug in the evening. This work is an unusual collaborative design project. It not only offers new perspectives on jewellery and textile art per se, but lifts applied art to new dimensions, in that two artists have worked together through their respective materials to meet in a single, integrated artwork. 

Hide & Seek – Things Are Not What They Seem was first shown at Galleri Sebastian Schildt, at Strandvägen 5b in Stockholm, from 22 April to 14 May 2017.

Aesthetic references for the work can be found in the stylised geometrical depictions of nature seen in the leaded glass of Louis Comfort Tiffany or Frank Lloyd Wright, for example, from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This particular combination of textiles and jewellery, however, is unique.

Hide & Seek – Things Are Not What They Seem forms a well-composed whole, but the individual parts also work on their own. The rug, as already noted, was made in smaller parts. These are intended to have their place on a wall, while the brooches can go out and about and be worn by someone for a while, before “landing” in their place on the rug in the evening.

This work is an unusual collaborative design project. It not only offers new perspectives on jewellery and textile art per se, but lifts applied art to new dimensions, in that two artists have worked together through their respective materials to meet in a single, integrated artwork.
Anna Forsberg
Anna Forsberg has been designing rugs for her firm Makeda since 2009. She was keen to turn her art and graphic design into useful objects, and therefore started working with rugs. On the one hand they are two-dimensional, on the other the textile materials enhance the patterns, in terms of both the saturation and the lustre of the colours. Several of Forsberg’s rugs have motifs representing the symmetrical patterns of insects. Forsberg comments that, already as a child, she was fascinated by her grandfather’s butterfly collection.

The rugs are made in Kathmandu in Nepal, where there is a long tradition of knotting rugs by hand. The materials used are wool and silk, dyed with plant dyes. As a rug is used its colour and texture gradually change, and according to Forsberg this mellowing contributes to its aesthetic quality.

Märta Mattsson
In the opening decades of the 21st century, Swedish jewellery art has attracted international attention. One of the artists contributing to this trend is Märta Mattsson. Her jewellery has revolved around nature in general and insects in particular. There are references in her work to the cabinets of curiosities and nautilus cups of the 17th century, with their fascinating juxtaposition of the wonders of nature and the skills of the craftsman. The Nationalmuseum has several works by Mattsson in its collections, the earliest acquisition being Beetlejuice from 2009 (Fig. 3). That piece consists of a real beetle, split down the middle, its innards replaced with yellow stones. The two parts are set in transparent plastic and can be worn as a brooch.

Cicadas have been a recurring motif in Mattsson’s jewellery. She may use the entire insect or remove its wings, shaping them into brooches, necklaces or earrings. She decorates the cicadas with enamels and glitter, and the beauty of their naturally transparent wings, especially,
is heightened by colours that bring out their shapes and patterns. Aesthetically, Mattsson’s jewellery art operates on the boundaries between the repulsive and the attractive, between kitsch and beauty.

Cicadas
Cicadas live in tropical climates. There are many species, and the largest can grow to 11 cm in length, with a wingspan of 22 cm. The wings are transparent, and the colour of the body, which is well adapted to the insect’s surroundings, can be brown, black, green or orange. The song of the males is one of the loudest sounds insects can produce, reaching up to 120 decibels. In China, cicadas are considered a delicacy.

Notes:
2. Ibid.
3. Makeda is the name of the Queen of Sheba in Ethiopian tradition. She brought great riches to King Solomon in Jerusalem, where she tested his wisdom with difficult questions and riddles. Satisfied with his answers, she exchanged gifts with him before returning home. Her gifts to the king included a magic carpet of green silk, inspiring Anna Forsberg to call her firm Makeda. www.makedarugs.com, accessed 17 March 2018.