

Bugged Out!!!

David Rogers: *Big Bugs*

At the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden through July 31

Think BIG. Think BUG. Think Timothy Burton meets E.O. Wilson with a bandsaw and a truckload of wood. Volkswagen-size ants and seven more of their insect cousins—handmade from tree limbs, logs, and metal—are now staking a space of their own in the Botanic Garden as part of a traveling sculpture exhibit touring the country.

Poised in the meadow, three giant ants with amber-colored eyes are reminiscent of the 1950s sci-fi thriller *Them* about a giant army of attack arthropods . . . they appear to be marching defiantly down from the mountains to seize the town and make it their own. It feels like they're not out of size, but, rather, *we are*, that they're not big, but we've been miniaturized.

The former boat and furniture maker David Rogers has applied his woodworking skills to create a whole fleet of invertebrates—by bending willow branches, carving giant logs of black locust, red cedar, and black walnut, and forming under-body armatures of metal—that honors the diminutive creatures on a dinosaur-size scale.

Out of a hundred botanic gardens that Rogers has seen, he believes that the natural style of landscaping at the Botanic Garden suits his bugs the best. And it's difficult to argue with him. A prehistoric-size damselfly sits poised on the pond's skin among the lily pads, its wings, though several feet long and made from willow branches, appear glasslike and delicate. Lurking among a primordial stand of giant redwoods, somewhere between light and shadow, stretches a 15-foot spider web and its maker, an arachnid. The monstrous polyped sits poised for attack like the spider in *Charlotte's Web* on steroids. Around the corner, a 17-foot-wide dragonfly bathes in the sun beneath a waterfall, casting a shadow of itself on the water.



David Rogers brings insects of all stripes to the S.B. Botanic Gardens, in a show entitled *Big Bugs*.

If the success of an artist lies in the ability to transcend his materials and achieve a deep emotional effect on the viewer, then Rogers triumphs with flying colors. The bugs don't excite the intellect, they explore the most primal of emotions.

A giant assassin bug sits quietly in the overgrown vegetation, its

mandible tucked up beneath its jaw. I imagine its straw-like proboscis extending out and piercing the skull of its prey, sucking its brains out like soup.

Ahh, another day in the garden.

May 6 is the *Big Bugs* opening day (free), with music, family activities, and lunch on the lawn.

—Rachel Thurston

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the reviews