

Press clips for Catherine Chalmers, **SAFARI** , 2006, Video, 7 min. 7 sec.  
From the exhibition: "*Ecotopia*," International Center of Photography, New York,  
Sept. 14 - Jan. 7, 2007

The most perversely entertaining piece in the show, Catherine Chalmers' video *Safari*, straddles the border between the real and the fanciful. This wordless, hallucinatory nature documentary is not precisely natural, nor exactly a documentary. Following the travails of a cockroach through a studio-constructed tropical paradise, its extreme close-ups present a world in which bizarre plants and animals engage in a constant dance of eat and be eaten. At the conclusion, a hopelessly anthropomorphic frog consumes the insect "hero" (sorry to spoil the ending), lasciviously spreading its front legs as if inviting applause.

How does Chalmers' over-the-top fable of consumption fit into the program of "Ecotopia"? It doesn't have a message - certainly not one that could be reduced to a position paper or an Al Gore - style "truth." Nor is it a call to action. Instead, like many of the most interesting works in the show, the video is oblique, depicting the natural world as utterly alien, yet strangely alluring. Successful art responds to social issues by complicating rather than simplifying them; the value of such projects lies precisely in this ambivalence.

Steven Stern, TIME OUT (New York), Oct. 26 - Nov. 1, 2006

Catherine Chalmers's deeply Darwinian "Safari," a seven-minute video, offers a ravishing experience of natural color by following the travails of some New York cockroaches, a species no longer found in the wild, after their release into an elaborate rain forest constructed in her studio. Other inhabitants include an African claw frog, for which cockroach spells dinner; red-spotted newts; a gorgeous lizard; a pair of ferociously battling beetles; and a harlequin cockroach, whose black and white stripes are ready for Fashion Week.

Roberta Smith, NEW YORK TIMES, Sept. 13, 2006

A Seven-minute video by Catherine Chalmers gives us a cockroach's view of jungle life, with some of the most stunning images of crawling things you'll ever see. Spider catches fly; stick insects come to life to run away from rain. It's not real nature imagery (Chalmers constructs her jungle in the studio) but that's all for the better. It means the piece has links to the constructed imagery of great still lifes, as well as to a stunning, naive nature film like "Microcosmos."

Blake Gopnik, WASHINGTON POST, Nov. 5, 2006.

Catherine Chalmers is known for her wry films and photographic series presenting episodes from the lives of insects and other fauna; houseflies getting executed, preying mantises mating, caterpillars feasting on tomatoes. At the Triennial, she will debut a new film, summarized by Squiers as being about “a cockroach emerging from the ocean to discover the various forms of animal life and other insects.” She goes on to say that for Chalmers, who uses live animals raised in her studio, “animal and insect life have become a kind of metaphor for the world at large.”

Daniel Kunitz, ART REVIEW (London), August, 2006

Her brilliant new video, “Safari,” could be subtitled “The City Bug’s Jungle Adventure.” In it, Chalmers tracks a cockroach as it explores the lush vegetation in her studio and encounters a series of unusual multilegged creatures and goggle-eyed reptiles. We’re given a roach’s-eye view of this surreal world of monumental centipedes and architectural foliage. Two rhinoceros beetles engaged in a duel look like clashing dinosaurs.

The video ends with the roach in the enormous maw of a frog, plucked from his part as big-eyed tourist to play the tragic role of dinner. Chalmers reminds us that nature is an unforgiving place, even without people. It’s beast-eat-beast out there.

Ariella Budick, NEWSDAY, Sept. 24, 2006

“Safari” by Catherine Chalmers is a visually stunning video that takes you down to one of the lowest levels of the animal kingdom - that of the cockroach. Chalmers has made a project of photographing this resilient insect, bane of many an urban apartment. In this piece, last of a trilogy, the cockroach is a wild species. In fact, with its jungle-like foliage, its giant raindrops and its predatory monsters (salamanders and frogs), this small-scale world looks like the last true wilderness. What’s more, even the creatures in it - so called pests - look as noble and majestic as the ones we typically admire, like whales or snow leopards. A scene where two rhinoceros beetles lock horns is twice as good as anything from “Jurassic Park,” not least because it’s real.

John Zeaman, HERALD/RECORD (New Jersey), Sept. 22

If you’re a true devotee of biodiversity, a believer in the inherent worth of all species, not just iconic ones like the soaring eagle and the cuddly koala, then logically you would have to appreciate the importance (and the improbable beauty) of even the humblest creatures. That’s the unspoken premise of the work of New York photographer and video artist Catherine Chalmers. In a recent short video called *Safari*, Chalmers strives to see the world through the eyes of an insect, “to try to understand what it is *not* to be human.” Hungry predators lurk in the foliage, stag beetles lock horns in mortal combat, flesh-eating plants envelop hapless flies. The lives of bugs, she says, involve “things that we consider amoral, horrifying, and really bizarre.” Like walking unsuspecting into the waiting jaws of this pygmy chameleon. OnEarth, NRDC, Winter 2006

The more eloquent pieces allow the images to speak for themselves, and inject a note of humor - even optimism - into the bleak vision much of the show conjures. Standouts include Catherine Chalmers's video "*Safari*," of a cockroach's view of life in the forest...

Jennie Yabroff, NEWSWEEK INT'L, Nov. 20, 2006.

While the course of human history was bad news for the dodo, it was great for the cockroach. In her mesmerizing seven-minute film *Safari*, Catherine Chalmers records the odyssey of a pair of New York cockroaches - a species no longer found in the wild - through a miniature rainforest she constructed in her studio. The super-macro photography, reminiscent of the 1996 film *Microcosmos*, is enthralling but definitely not for the squeamish. Highlights of the journey include an epic battle between a pair of well-armored rhinoceros beetles and a scene in which a lizard casually caresses its own shiny eyeball with a long pink tongue.

Mia Fineman, SLATE.COM, Oct. 19, 2006

Entering Ecotopia, the sounds of nature - the squeaking, buzzing, the rustling of reeds - is the first thing one hears. These sounds were created by Catherine Chalmers to accompany her totally engaging, fantastically beautiful seven-minute video "*Safari*," which features insects, amphibians and reptiles as its stars, romping through a lush and verdant set, a wee Eden in Chalmers's Soho studio. The reconstruction is a good one, and it's something we must do with increasing frequency, having rid ourselves of nature and its nuisances.

Viola Salzedo-Gramm, NEW YORK PRESS, Sept. 27 - Oct. 3, 2006