



<http://acinstitute.org/blue-unnatural-acts-catalog/>

Technology and Humble Things
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Throughout time, artists have turned to nature for inspiration. The advancement of technology in the study of the environment, from the development of perspective to taxonomy to the camera, has provided tools that, while not designed for aesthetic pursuits, have been used by artists to better represent the natural world. In this way, technology has always been a mediator between people and nature.

Biomimetic artists like China Blue use science and technology to study and copy nature. Whether capturing the sounds of Venice and its encroaching water in Aqua Alta or exploring the biological evolution of manufacturing wastes in Seventh Kingdom, China Blue uses technology to bring attention to environmental issues. In Photini (Biomimetic Fireflies), the use of found objects and technological refuse, the growing stock pile of electronically outdated but functional detritus, are the stuff of her work whose humble subject, the firefly, becomes a metaphor for the fragility of the natural world. China Blue raises awareness to the diminishing numbers of fireflies in the wild where light pollution interferes with their mating rituals. Instead of villainizing technology, she uses the science of bioluminescence and sound to create a piece that is an amalgamation of tech and handicraft through which she is able to enlighten, teach and visually engage.

The advancement of technology has been defined by the "commoditization and domination" of the natural world.¹ A rift between humankind and nature developed through industrialization and became imbedded in the social fabric as that which is Other and distant.² Rampant pollution, overhunting and finishing and denials of global warming spring from such distancing.

Yet just as nature is distanced from human contact, so is the art of the human hand lost through technology which has been streamlined, taken for granted and hidden from view. The philosopher Albert Borgmann called us slaves to technology and sought a middle ground between extreme technology and a pre-technological world. In his 1984, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*,³ he proposed a world filled with less complicated devices run by human manipulation and, more importantly, a world filled with more art. He termed simple handmade technologies "Focal things and practices."⁴ According to Borgmann, these humble objects become gathering points whose function is "to show, to point out, to bring to light, to set before one, and then also to explain and teach."⁵ These objects illuminate their surroundings through their presence, demanding acknowledgment and fostering "sympathy and tolerance."⁶

China Blue's handmade technology seems the embodiment of Borgmann's humble and focal thinking. In mimicking nature, one does not seek to control nature only to celebrate it. The firefly, infused with the magic and mystery of warm nights, creates a yearning and nostalgia for childhood wonder and delight in simple things. China Blue's crafted insect, with its sound and blinking light, illuminates a small part of the natural world and holds a community in quiet contemplation.

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¹ Higgs, Eric, Andrew Light, and David Strong. *Technology and the Good Life?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 89.

² <https://sge.lclark.edu/research/environmental-narratives-in-biomimetic-art-architecture>.

³ Borgmann, Albert. *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

⁴ Higgs, Light and Strong, 2000, 92.

⁵ Borgmann, 1984, 179.

⁶ Higgs, Light and Strong, 2000, 92.