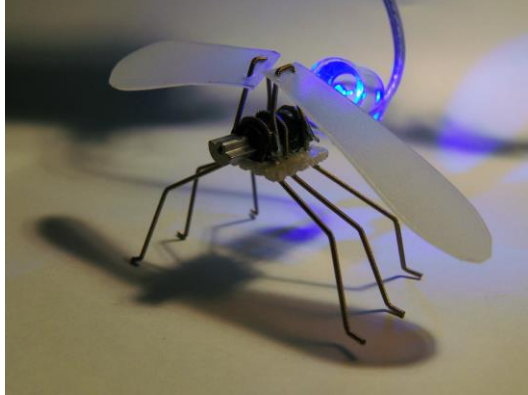


THE BOSTON PHOENIX

August 9, 2011



A detail from Blue's *Firefly 2.0*.

China Blue of Rhode Island also teases out patterns from nature in her "Firefly Projects" at the Newport Art Museum, 76 Bellevue Avenue, Newport, through September 5). Inspired by news reports that scientists are beginning to suspect that firefly populations may be in decline, she devises computer programs and LEDs to mimic the blinking mating flashes of the North American firefly.

Firefly 2.0 is four jam jars with large faux bugs inside. When viewers pass close, they trigger the electronic insects to light up, buzz, and jiggle inside the glass like wind-up toys. *Firefly Trees* is two seven-and-a-half-foot tall posts wrapped with wires in patterns that might suggest bark. Straight rods jut out like branches. Faux fireflies are clipped to the rods, and blink on and off in irregular patterns like blue LED Christmas lights. The structures are unsatisfyingly schematic, seeming more like coat racks than trees, which keeps them from getting into the magical territory that we often identify with fireflies.

Three photos documenting Blue's *Firefly Cloud* show a cluster of LEDs suspended under a weather balloon that she then pulled through a neighborhood at night. Blue programmed the blinking to imitate the rate of firefly flashing. The photos are unclear about just what is going on, but they suggest the most potential for realizing the artist's intriguing idea. Putting the blinking electronics back into nature, hovering under a balloon subject to the vagaries of wind, Blue begins to merge technology and nature, the artificial special effects with the natural wonder.

Read Greg Cook's blog at gregcookland.com/journal.