

# Artist is king of the bugs

By John E. Mitchell  
North Adams Transcript

**NORTH ADAMS** — In Jason Lockyer's work, the inner physical world of insects and the inner psychological world of humans are merged into a surrealistic — and humorous — landscape.

Lockyer's work is on display at the Avalon Seafood Gallery at 7 Holden St.

His images are filled with birds and a variety of bugs in a style that lends personality — if not out and out humanity — to their appearances that stops short of all-out anthropomorphism. A closer look reveals that the images aren't just representations of animals that exist in nature — they are a form of biological collage in which Lockyer takes portions of multiple creatures and mixes them into each other in a creative alchemy as if he were an artistic version of Dr. Moreau.

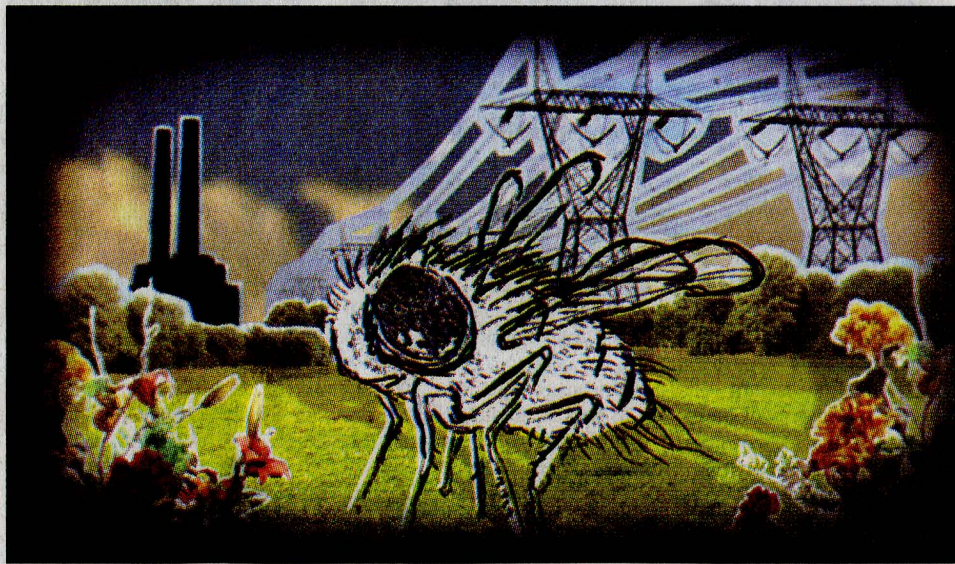
Lockyer began largely drawing birds, the direct result of a childhood spent tagging along with his father, a painter, professional naturalist and scientific illustrator. As a forest ranger — and art director at the forest service — Lockyer's dad's life was filled with an interest in nature that seeped into his son's consciousness and was cemented in hikes and bird watching.

It also helped that Lockyer's father was a working artist who included his son in those activities as well.

"My dad would do a lot of the street fairs, so I grew up going to those with him," Lockyer said in an interview this week. "He'd sell his watercolors, and he put up a little wall for me and I'd sit there and draw, have my own little exhibition. It evolved from there. I remember his friends coming up to me and saying, 'Do you want to be an artist like your dad?' and I'd always be like, 'No! Of course not! I think I was destined into that role even if I wanted to fight it when I was young.'"

Originally, Lockyer focused on birds as the centerpieces of his paintings, putting them in different landscapes — a direct reflection of his father's work.

"I never thought about it and never related it or drew a parallel until he was cleaning up his studio and showing me some old paintings he did when he was younger," Lockyer said. "They were very similar to some of the paintings I was working on at the time, similar brush stroke, landscapey kinds of things. I guess it is in the genes."



A scene from Jason Lockyer's animation work.

Lockyer's take on the same subject matter was a way for him to examine two seemingly separate tracks — man and nature — by melding them into one thing moving along a fantasy line.

"It's definitely evolved, meandering around the periphery of the main idea of nature and man's relationship with nature, and man's relationship with himself," he said. "That's always been at the core, but I've investigated it in different ways."

His biggest leap came several years ago when he began focusing more on bugs and insects rather than birds — a way of freeing up his imagination and that of his audience, while still relying on a shared perception of "bug-ness" to play on the viewer's visual references. They're bugs as we recognize them — and, yet, not at all.

"With the bugs, I found it was more interesting, and I could get away with being more far-fetched," Lockyer said. "I could play with them a little more and had a lot more leeway with getting away with being creative. With a bird that has five wings, you recognize right away that it's a strange bird, but with a bug, you can get away with more liberties, putting all kinds of appendages and different things on there, like wings and horns and what-not, and people will identify it — 'That's a bug.' There are a lot of weird bugs out there."

Lockyer's process involves compiling nearly 300 bug pictures, whittling them down to about 20 images and seeing what he can come up with in preliminary draw-

ings. From there, he will cut the number in half and create images drawing from the different elements of his final choices.

"For me, it was a decision where I could really investigate these different things and take elements of different bugs and put them on other kinds of bugs to create a super-bug type of thing," he said. "It was fun to really get in there and chop and cut and paste and put things together."

He also lends personality to the creatures through titles to his images, such as "steve watched lisa dress again," "todd also watched lisa dress" and "rob was alone, he was not happy." These add a form of back story — as well as an emotional backdrop — that is furthered by the physical characteristics he chooses to include — horns, obesity, eye size.

"I like to give certain personalities, and the titles come after I've done the drawings and I implement them into the paintings," Lockyer said. "They become more complete, and I get a persona of what that bug might do or how he might react, and fly, in our world if he was an actual person. That overlaps into the whole idea of bugs, what if they feelings — maybe they do have feelings, but I doubt it — or they lose their love, stop dating that person. I like to project those emotions onto the bugs, to give them validity."

Lockyer is delighted by the idea that a much-maligned majority on our planet is being handed a level of sympathy when people encounter his work.

"Bugs have a pretty negative connotation for I would imagine most people, and for me, I sort of like that," he said. "I think 90 percent of all creatures on this earth are bugs. I like the fact that we're overrun by these things and yet we displace them or ignore them. When you think about it, they're all around us."

Lockyer also hopes he creates an empathy by casting an identifiable light on the icky things and maybe even shifting the center of the universe as humans perceive from themselves to the smaller things on the planet. In this way, his Dr. Moreau machinations are more thematic than biological — he adds emotional human elements to the presentation that give viewers something to latch onto. His tact is less to humanize the bugs than to bring the humans down to insect level.

"You have this weird bug/bird thing on death's doorstep, where it's decaying or it looks like it's been in the gutter for five months or something — that's the kind of thing I like to play with," he said. "This guy's on death's door, but he's still pining after this fictitious love that he lost maybe 10 years ago."

The creature paintings have been a way for Lockyer to investigate his own emotions and experiences.



Image courtesy of Jason Lockyer

A silk screen print from bug art.

"These guys are definitely facets of my subconscious," he said. "They're definitely manifestations of feelings I have and feelings that I think a lot of people have. I think it's one of those things where I try to play on those universal themes, almost John Hughes-style filmmaking: 'Oh, that was painful, I feel bad! Those overall feelings that are universal — everyone has them — those emotions where you just feel bad; sometimes you feel up.'"

Lockyer has utilized the same imagery for short animations he has shown in festivals around the country. The films enter into similar territory as the paintings but bring them alive in a way that incorporates not only his painting techniques, but also photographic images, and moving collages that dance around an often intricate soundscape for a more experimental feel.

"A lot of the films, I was just getting out of a bad relationship, so those are gut-wrenching — stuff

that I had to get out," Lockyer said. "A lot of them are vignettes and deal with love and loss and things like that. A lot of those feelings are carried in through the stuff I'm doing with bugs and the titles and the personalities."

The show at the Avalon Seafood Gallery marks the first time he has been able to bring the separate parts of his creative work together in a gallery setting. It will include projections of the videos, as well as drawings and paintings, along with prints and silk screens created from the projections.

While Lockyer gives different parts of his work a singular voice, he sees that unity as doing the same for the creatures that inhabit his images as well as their real life counterparts — after all, even bugs deserve some dignity.

"It's sort of like I'm creating a stage where these guys can rise up and say, 'Hey, we're here, too!'"

Jason Lockyer can be found at [www.jasonlockyer.com](http://www.jasonlockyer.com).

## Classic books meet classic comic strips

By John E. Mitchell  
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Masterpiece Comics  
by R. Sikoryak  
(Drawn and Quarterly)

Most people are familiar with Classics Illustrated, but with this



stylistic turns of the 1940s version of the superhero.

"Masterpiece Comics" could have been a series of jokes and shallow parodies tossed off, but Sikoryak comes off as way too smart to waste his time on the shallow. He

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