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Note: Reporters are invited to interview artist Lorenzo Possenti at the Academy of Natural Sciences on Friday, Oct. 21. To schedule an interview, call 215-299-1043.

BUGS... OUTSIDE THE BOX: DISCOVER THE ART WITHIN THE SCIENCE OPENS OCTOBER 22

New exhibit of giant sculptures also features live bugs!

PHILADELPHIA (September 29, 2011) — Giant, exquisitely detailed insect sculptures from Italy will make their U.S. debut at the Academy of Natural Sciences starting Saturday, Oct. 22 in an exhibit that highlights the beauty and complexity of the often maligned mini-beasts of nature.

A rarely seen long-armed beetle nearly 10 feet tall. A colorful butterfly with a five-foot wingspan. A heavily armored stag beetle with jaws as big as a man's leg. These amazing creatures are among the beautiful bugs featured in *Bugs... Outside the Box: Discover the Art Within the Science*, an artsy take on the biological architecture of the most diverse group of organisms on Earth. The exhibit runs through Monday, Jan. 16, 2012, and is free with museum admission.

In addition to the sculptures, a variety of live insects from the Academy's Live Animal Center will be on display, as well as specimens from the Academy's world-renowned Entomology Collection. Academy entomologists will be on hand periodically to demonstrate their curatorial work and to answer visitors' questions.

The artist's technique

Created by Lorenzo Possenti of Pisa, Italy, the hand-crafted, scientifically accurate—except for their size—bug sculptures are meant to challenge the perception of beauty and celebrate the art of science. To make his sculptures, Possenti takes great pains to recreate the insect as it looks in life. He uses a stereomicroscope to study each insect specimen, paying especially close attention to how its joints function.

"After modeling each moveable element, I build the molds and pour a special resin into them," Possenti explained. The replica is then finished off, set and painted. "After that I use my special finishing varnish—the ecofauna finish—which really makes the insects look real." Then he adds hairs and bristles.

Dr. Jon Gelhaus, the Academy's curator of entomology, gets to look at the beauty and complexity of insects through a microscope all the time, but laments that most people don't have that advantage.

"Insects are fantastically constructed, but most people never get to see and appreciate this unless they are looking through a microscope," Gelhaus said. "With this exhibit, the sculptures are up to 200 times larger than life, allowing visitors to see every beautiful detail and gain a greater appreciation for this wonderful group of organisms."

About the artist

Possenti became interested in life and evolution as a child. "Dinosaurs were one of my first interests," he said. As a teen he started studying insects and reading a lot of science fiction novels. "I was attracted by aliens and not the human way of life." He put his interests and imagination together and began creating fantastical comics featuring humans and super creatures, including giant insects acting like humans.

Once he began observing insects under a microscope, he discovered their beauty and diversity—and something else. "I realized I was finally observing a true alien. All my interests in natural science and art converged in one." He wanted other people to appreciate bugs and started to build large-scale models for institutions in Italy. *Bugs... Outside the Box* marks his first showing in America.

Bugs... Outside the Box was created by Outhouse Exhibit Services, Inc. For more information about the exhibit, visit www.ansp.org/bugs-outside-the-box.

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To download images from the exhibit, visit www.ansp.org/press/photos. For more information about Lorenzo Possenti, visit www.ecofauna.com.

Founded in 1812, the Academy of Natural Sciences is America's oldest natural history museum and a world leader in biodiversity and environmental research. For nearly 200 years, the Academy has carried out its mission to encourage and cultivate the sciences, exploring the remarkable diversity of our natural world and sharing these discoveries with the public through innovative exhibits, publications, and educational programming.

HOURS: Monday–Friday, 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m.; Saturday–Sunday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. ADMISSION: \$12 adults; \$10 children 3-12, seniors, college students, and military personnel; free for members and children under 3. \$2 fee for Butterflies! PHONE: 215-299-1000