

AnneMarie Maes. Bees. Rights of Nature •



Figure 1. AnneMarie Maes exhibition Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona.

AnneMarie Maes in Beehive: Where are the Bees?

Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona

16-February to 20 May 2018

Post #5

Circulating through the Fundació Miró, I'm reminded that the 1972 museum building was designed by Josep Lluís Sert and, that the exhibition I'm seeking, was curated by Martina Millà. There, in collaboration with the building's space and curatorial brief, AnneMarie Maes investigates the too-little-appreciated cognitive performance between bees, nature, and humans. Doing so, her installation delivers glimpses of bee intelligence. In this artist-, architect-, curator-, mediated space, a species' cognition — nearly foreign to humans — unfolds a little bit. Using images she made with a scanning electron microscope (SEM), Maes surrounds her sculptures to investigate bee morphology, social order, navigation, and architecture rich with implications for cities, urban gardens, and social systems.

Entering the gallery, one is faced with the large SEM prints depicting secrets of bee physiology (Fig. 1). The photomurals are accompanied with two groups of sculptures and a video of bees in their hive. My experience was to bob back-and-forth — oscillate — between sculptures, images, and video. That oscillation, seemed appropriate to my outwardly erratic search-register-learn behavior akin — if only metaphorically — to the bees' own oscillations around flowers and their intelligent scouting, discovery, and dancing. Their scouting, discovery, and dancing I contrast to our own social scampering, pillaging, and polluting.

The works make evident, a schism between bee intelligence and human's differently evolved intelligence, bridged by Maes's work. That practice is conveyed in a visual narrative of alternative-worlds of bee reality different from our own constructed realities made visible through computation, technological imaging, and biological research. In this sense, the exhibition is part of perceptual visual language interpreting bee works in a dialogue processed in artworks. The show is then a pathway for negotiating art and communication vis-à-vis nature and urban policies to encourage bee cohabitation and protection in cities.



Figure 2. AnneMarie Maes. HoneyBattery.

In response to Maes's research, I reintroduce the idea of species justice related through legal and legislative precedents documented by Christopher D. Stone. In his 1972 paper, "Should Trees Have Standing? — Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects,"¹ Stone argued cases in the United States for recognizing that trees, rivers, animals, and mountains have inalienable rights. Those rights include, not only preservation and protection, but legal recourse and settlements whereby environments and organisms are owed compensation for damage caused by pollution or industry.

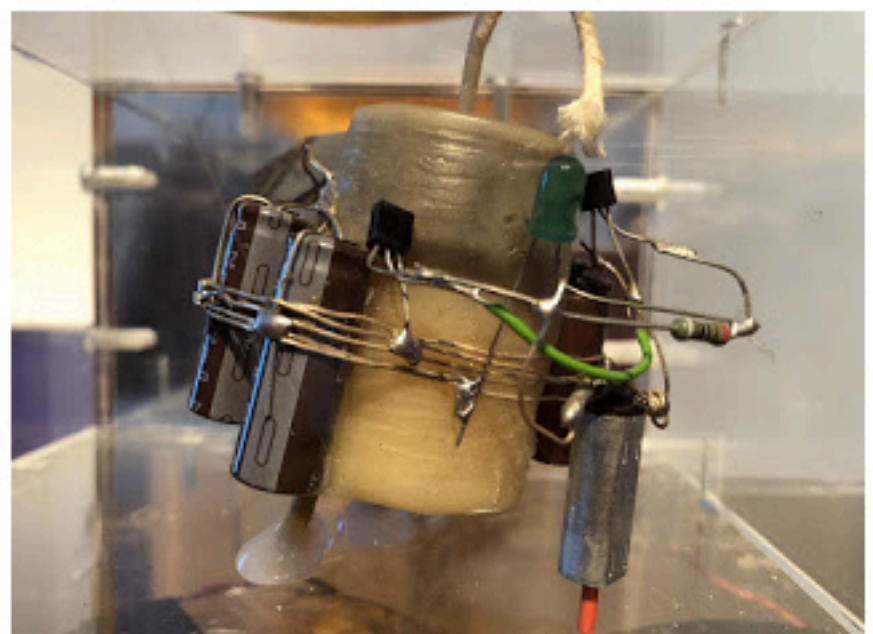


Figure 3. AnneMarie Maes. Robot dipped in beeswax.

Seeing Maes's work, I think it is again time to support justice for nature against individuals and corporations causing catastrophic global damage. In Europe, Bee genocide facilitated with neonicotinoids manufactured by international corporations, seems to have arrived at scientific and political consensus needed to halt the toxins' released into the environment. This is then a text to celebrate Maes, as well as to support further bans outside of the European Union². Catalyzed around an exhibition such as Beehive, a spearhead should again push for worldwide species justice. In parallel, learning from Switzerland's 2000 constitutional clause, and Ecuador's 2008 constitution with its Rights of Nature³ amendment, could be powerful rallying points for state- and city-level political change — where one of the necessary steps, would include legalizing beehives in cities.

Under the umbrella of Stone's essay, the visual narrative at the Miró Foundation can nurture conservation roots found in the artist's thinking, texts, and scientific collaborations. Maes's books: *The Transparent Beehive Notebook* and *Alchimia Nova* (see Post XXX), along with her website registry of experiments, makes these resources nearly as mobile as airborne pollen, and thus candidates for viral distribution; smartphone-friendly, documents-for-action and research. Those documents, and others, buttress conversations circulating in ecology realms focused on climate change, neighborhood design, urban policy, and metabolic buildings. Consequently, Maes's work initiates and tests ways to strengthen bee/human partnerships in cities; another investigates bioreactive materials such as biofilms (see Post #3) and devices for listening, seeing, monitoring, and learning *bee-being* — bee ontology.



Figure 4. AnneMarie Maes. Top: Hive fragment.

Bottom: Maes's construction of a hivelike segment.

At the Miró, Maes's work can be established as idea generators. Consequently, the HoneyBattery (Fig. 2) and the beebot it powered — a hop-along robot dipped in beeswax (Fig. 3) — display levels of inventiveness signaling deep, if sometimes whimsical, thinking. More obviously architectural, a segment of a hive (top, Fig. 4) served as a template Maes followed to build "Lace," her experiment to construct a hive segment (bottom, Fig. 4). This netlike work, exemplifies how, by isolating sections of hive manufacture, generative models can be brought to architectural thinking through observation of nature. The message I take away from the show underpins design-by-research as sourced in cellular life/intelligence, observation, and experimentation. The exhibition is a gateway to inspiration involving eco-responsive systems and, it simultaneously situates learning between nature and technology, as poetic and political and achievable.

References

1. Stone, Christopher D. 1972. "Should Trees Have Standing? — Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects." *Southern California Law Review* 45. 450-501. <https://iseethics.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/stone-christopher-d-should-trees-have-standing.pdf>
2. Carrington, Damian. 2018. "Total ban on bee-harming pesticides likely after major new EU analysis." *The Guardian*. 28 February 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/feb/28/total-ban-on-bee-harming-pesticides-likely-after-major-new-eu-analysis>
3. Sumac Kawsay (Ecuador. Rights of Nature). Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumac_Kawsay

Dennis Dollens

Dennis Dollens has a PhD in architecture and an MSc in digital education / eLearning both from the University of Edinburgh. He is based in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Barcelona Spain and teaches in the BioDigital Master Program at the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya His most recent book is "Metabolic Architectures: Turing, Sullivan, Autopoiesis & AI." His earlier book, DBA3: Autopoietic Architecture: Can Buildings Think? is free at Issuu.com.