

Salamander Portraits Bridge Art & Science

The Cryptic Ones by Brandon Ballengée and Stanley K. Sessions, curated by Amy Lipton

Exhibition on view at the Schuylkill Center, January 11 – March 16, 2013

Artist Walk & Talk: Saturday, March 9, 2013, 4:00 – 6:00 pm



What happens when an artist focuses his vision on a field of scientific inquiry? In the case of eco-artist Brandon Ballengée, it led to significant advances in scientific knowledge and the beautiful and provocative salamander portraits on display at the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education now through March 16, 2013.

For more than a decade, Ballengée and biologist Stanley K. Sessions have collaborated to study the health of wild amphibian populations and document their findings to inform viewers about current ecological issues. In *The Cryptic Ones*, now on view in the center's gallery, Ballengée and Sessions use photography and high-resolution electronic imaging to reveal salamanders in colorful and fascinating detail.

On Saturday, March 9 from 4:00 – 6:00 pm, Ballengée will team up again, this time with *GRID* magazine's urban naturalist Bernard Brown, for a walk and talk about art, science and amphibians. The event begins in the Schuylkill Center's gallery, where Ballengée will present his research and art-making practice. Then, Ballengée and Brown will lead a woodland walk to the center's amphibian hotspots.

Amphibians are extraordinary survivors, having lived on Earth for over 160 million years. And yet, over the last 50 years, over 200 species of amphibians throughout the world have declined markedly in numbers with reports of 32 species extinctions. In many instances, these declines are attributable to adverse human influences such as deforestation, draining of wetlands, introduction of non-native species, and general environmental degradation. Because amphibians are very sensitive to changes in their environments, they serve as warnings of environmental stress, essentially functioning as ecological alarms.

Through their scientific collaborations, Ballengée and Sessions have made important discoveries about the reasons for developmental deformities among wild populations of amphibians, such as parasitic infection and predatory injury, and they have published these results in scientific journals.

The salamander portraits were made as part of a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship at the Institute for Electronic Arts, School of Art and Design, New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred, New York. *The Cryptic Ones* was curated by Amy Lipton, Co-director of ecoartspace (<http://ecoartspace.org/index.html>).

Brandon Ballengée, Professor, School of Visual Arts, New York, NY. Ballengée explores boundaries between art, science and technology and creates multidisciplinary works generated from field trips and research. Ballengée has exhibited internationally at the Centro d'Arte Contemporanea, Torino, Italy, and in a solo exhibition at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in NYC.

Stanley K. Sessions, Professor, Department of Biology, Hartwick College, Oneonta, NY. Sessions' expertise is in evolutionary and developmental biology. He teaches Animal Development, Evolution, Natural History of Vertebrates, and Developmental Genetics plus an off-campus course on the Natural History of Costa Rica. His research interests include developmental and cytogenetic studies in amphibians, with recent focus on the natural causes of amphibian deformities.

About the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education

Founded in 1965, the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education (SCEE) is one of the first urban environmental education centers in the country. It encompasses over 340 acres of privately held land in the Roxborough neighborhood of Philadelphia. In addition to a huge variety of educational and enrichment programs for the adults, children, school groups and professionals, the center supports a cutting edge environmental art program, a land restoration program and native plant nursery, and a wildlife rehabilitation clinic. (<http://www.schuylkillcenter.org/>)

What: *The Cryptic Ones* exhibition
Artist Walk & Talk with Bernard Brown and Brandon Ballengée

When: Exhibition: January 11 – March 16, Monday – Saturday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
Walk and Talk: Saturday, March 9, 4:00 – 6:00 pm

Where: Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education
8480 Hagy's Mill Road
Philadelphia, PA 19128