



FROM VIRGIL'S **GEORGICS**

Now therefore it is time to give an account
Of the nature of the bees and the way they live,
Ordained for them by Jupiter himself...
They live together under the rule of law...
For some the charge and obligation
Is to labor in the fields; for others, the task
Is to begin to build the honeycomb,
Spreading the resinous tears of the narcissus
And gluey stuff brought in from the bark of trees,
And building partition walls of clinging wax;
Others are charged with bringing up the young,
The nation's hope, to enter into adulthood;
Others pack purest honey into the cells
That swell and enlarge, infused with liquid nectar;
The task of others is to guard the doors
And watch the skies for signs of clouds and rain,
And accept into the hive the bees returning,
Carrying what they're bringing from the fields,
And, as an armed patrol, to drive away
The lazy crowd of drones from the busy stalls.

The community is glowing as it works;
The honey is fragrant with the scent of thyme.

Translated by David Ferry

*The Georgics is a poem dedicated to the arts of agriculture.
Virgil made beekeeping the central focus of the last of his poem's four books.*

THE MOST FASCINATING COMMUNITY

HUMANS HAVE BEEN FASCINATED BY BEES FOR MILLENNIA.

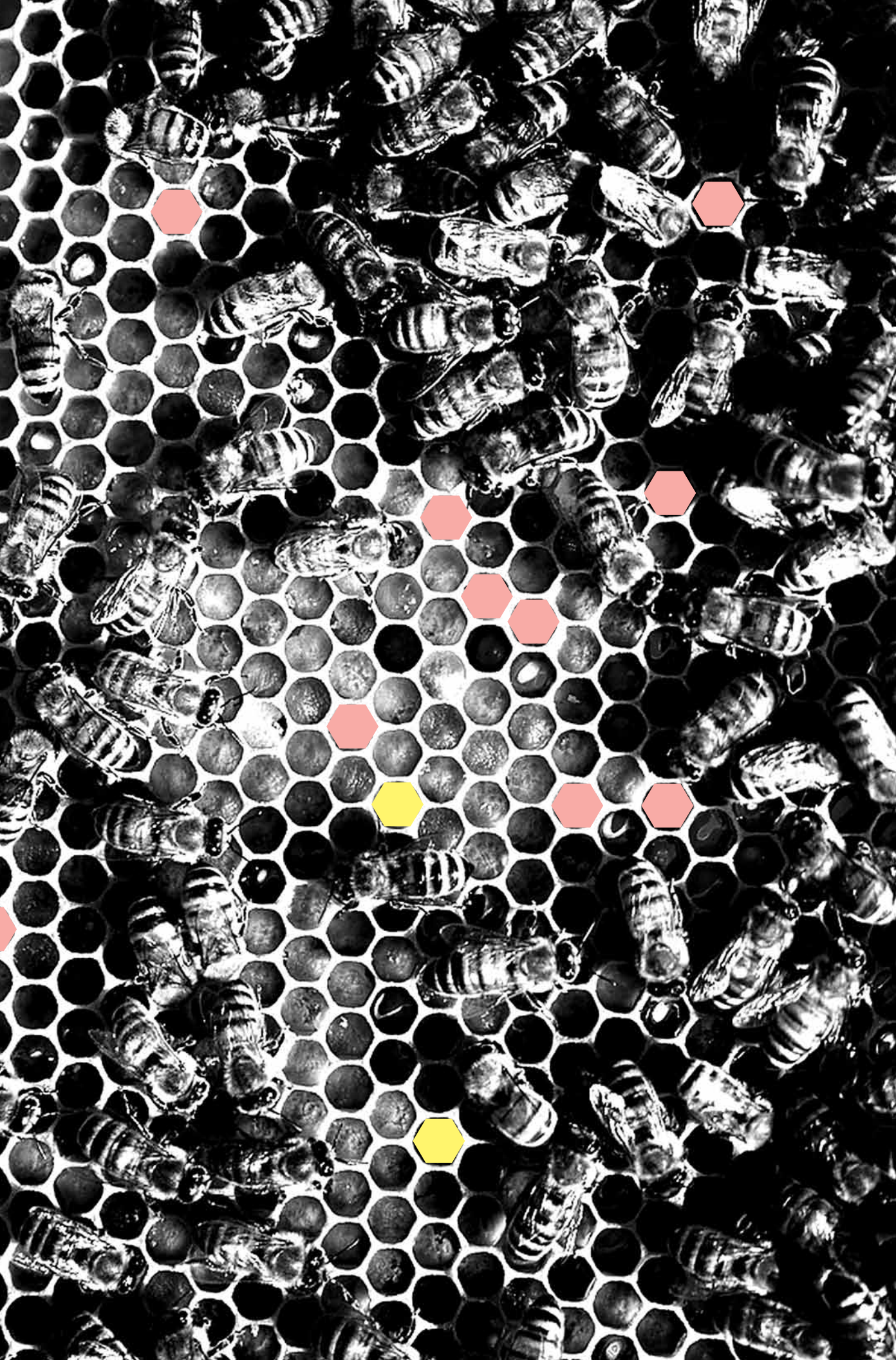
And why not? As creatures extraordinarily social, they remind us of ourselves or of what we would most like to be: busy bees living together harmoniously in a hive of activity, rushing to our assigned tasks for the greater good of the many, cooperating with our fellows to create the sweetness in life, coexisting peacefully but willing to defend the community even at the cost of our lives. The scene could be a blueprint for utopia.

But there is, or should be, even more to our fascination with bees than this. It's a matter of the services their communities render ours. Honey, of course, is the great product of the bees that has been pleasing our palettes for ages. Yet the benefits bees confer go deeper still. Think about it. Where would we be without the pollinating prowess of the humble bee? Would there be agriculture as we know it? Would there be community as we know it or culture as we know it? Would humans ever have evolved much beyond hunting and gathering?

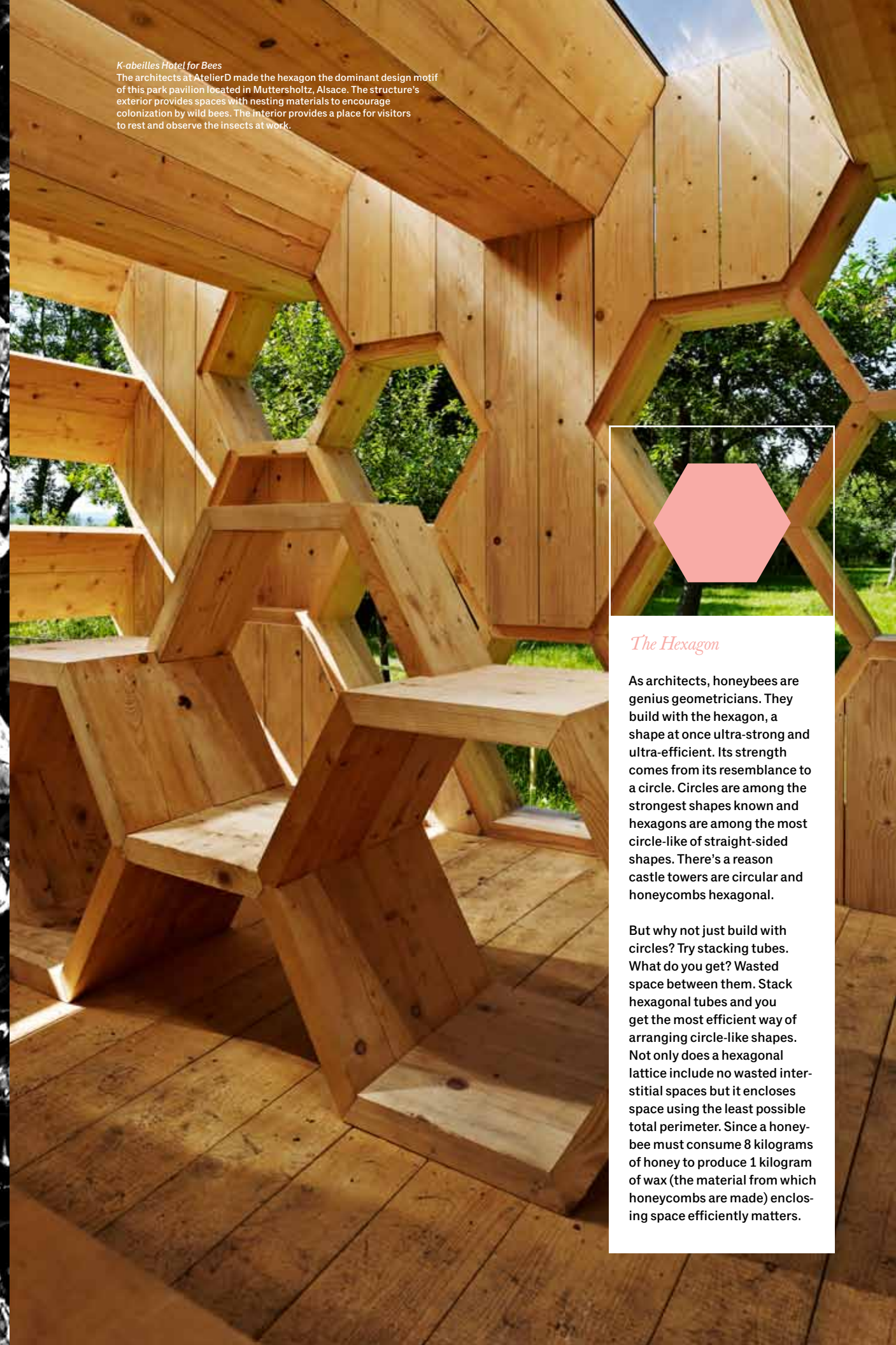
When Hambly & Woolley was asked to create an issue of *Wayward Arts* devoted to the theme of community, the bee sprang to mind as a natural subject. In the pages that follow, you'll find an interesting mix of articles on the bee in nature and the bee in culture. Both visually and verbally, we address the architecture of the honeycomb, honey hunting in Cameroon and colony collapse disorder. We explore bees in popular culture, bees as a decorative motif associated with the emperor Napoleon and bees as collaborators of Canadian artist Aganetha Dyck. We interview graphic designer and apiarist Russell Gibbs on his experiences keeping bees and present journalist James Chatto's personal essay on the bees of the Greek island where he sometimes lives.

Having interacted with us for thousands of years, bees are among the creatures with which we humans are most familiar. We hope our publication will help persuade you that they remain as fascinating as ever.





K-abeilles Hotel for Bees
The architects at Atelier D made the hexagon the dominant design motif of this park pavilion located in Mutterstoltz, Alsace. The structure's exterior provides spaces with nesting materials to encourage colonization by wild bees. The interior provides a place for visitors to rest and observe the insects at work.



The Hexagon

As architects, honeybees are genius geometers. They build with the hexagon, a shape at once ultra-strong and ultra-efficient. Its strength comes from its resemblance to a circle. Circles are among the strongest shapes known and hexagons are among the most circle-like of straight-sided shapes. There's a reason castle towers are circular and honeycombs hexagonal.

But why not just build with circles? Try stacking tubes. What do you get? Wasted space between them. Stack hexagonal tubes and you get the most efficient way of arranging circle-like shapes. Not only does a hexagonal lattice include no wasted interstitial spaces but it encloses space using the least possible total perimeter. Since a honeybee must consume 8 kilograms of honey to produce 1 kilogram of wax (the material from which honeycombs are made) enclosing space efficiently matters.





ExtraWhite

White

Golden

LIGHT AMBER

Dark Amber

DARK

SOMETHING WAY GREATER

*An Interview with Russell Gibbs,
Graphic Designer and Beekeeper*

I understand that you come from a family of beekeepers. Is that right?

Beekeeping in our family goes back at least four generations. Two of my dad's brothers are commercial beekeepers near Cornwall. They took it over from my grandfather, who did it as more of a hobby. He learned from his father. Back then, that's what farmers did. If they wanted honey, they'd keep some bees.

How did someone who comes from a family of beekeepers end up a designer?

I grew up in Kitchener, not on a farm. At school, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do but I gravitated toward classes in art and music. Design was an accident, really. I was funnelled in that direction because it's the paying artistic job. I fell in love with it from the moment I started doing it.

What, then, was the source of your interest in bees?

After working in Toronto for eight years, my wife and I just weren't into big city life anymore. So we moved out to Dundas, a town in a valley in the middle of the Niagara Escarpment. We started by wanting to support local farmers and discovered where to get local fruits and vegetables and meat. Then I thought, "I'd like to do something. I'd love to connect with nature." But I can't grow anything to save my life. So, talking to my dad about it, he said, "Why don't you try beekeeping? It's been in the genes forever." He gave me a book and his old veil and I said, "Alright, I'm going to do this."

As easy as that?

Well, I started going out to meetings of the local beekeeping association. I hit some brick walls—I was the youngest guy there by at least 10 years. But I decided to buy some bees anyway, and I found a local beekeeper whom I really connected with and who turned into a bit of a mentor. He really showed me the ropes.

What do you do with the honey your bees produce?

When I started, I made sure to take care of the bees. I didn't want to push them. So last year was the first that I had actual product, which was very exciting for me because that's where design and beekeeping merge. The first order of business was branding it, doing a website and, of course, packaging it. I began selling over the web (to places as far away as California) but mostly through local farmers' markets and my local network. The jars just flew off the shelf. As soon as I harvested, I was sold out.

Your plan is to continue in this way?

My uncles focus on filling commercial orders rather than on retailing their honey directly. My focus is the opposite. As soon as spring hits, as soon as things start to thaw out and the bees fly, I'll be checking the hives and planning my trips to the Friday or Saturday markets. It's a total switch from my main source of income. It's awesome.

What's distinctive about your honey?

It's a great mix of everything that makes Ontario honey amazing. My bees are surrounded by hay fields and pasture. There's a lot of clover and thistle and other such plants. Clover

really balances things out; it has a very even flavour. In our area, there's also some Black Locust. It's a tree but it's a big producer of nectar off its buds in spring. It has a very distinctive flavour to it. Beekeepers who go for more of a varietal honey will look for a big stand of Black Locust to set their colonies near.

Is there a distinctive Ontario style of honey?

There are lots of different flavours from lots of different areas, but I could tell you blanket what's from Ontario. There's always that clover undertone because clover is everywhere. A friend brought me some honey from Italy. It was completely different—very light, very even, no real burst of sugary flavour.

Has everything gone as you expected?

So far, I can't complain at all. But you experience the ups and downs of beekeeping. Last year I added five new colonies. One just wasn't taking off. So I talked to the beekeeper I bought the colonies from. He thought the bees had been affected by neonicotinoid, which is a pesticide used to treat corn seeds. In the beekeeping world, they've been talking about it quite a lot. [It has been linked to colony collapse disorder.] As the seeds germinate, they make the soil around almost toxic. The bees would have grabbed standing water off a nearby cornfield and brought it back to poison the colony. The queen stopped laying eggs.

Although the beekeeper told me to destroy the colony, I tried to baby it back to health. But he was right. There was nothing I could do. Eventually, all that was left of the colony, maybe 40 or 100 pathetic bees, swarmed away. It was kind of sad.

What's been your biggest revelation about bees?

It's that there's this little insect, taken for granted by so many people, that's way smarter than we are. Just watching bees is so incredibly fascinating. The first time I saw a "bee dance" blew my mind. These things don't talk but, within a day of being located in a new place, they had found the nectar source. I watched six or eight bees on the landing board of my colony doing that bee dance, instructing the other bees as to where the nectar was. They all know what's going on. They're all communicating with each other. In keeping bees, I always have this feeling that I'm interacting with something that's way greater than I am. I'm in their world.



THEY ALL KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON. THEY'RE ALL COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER. IN KEEPING BEES, I ALWAYS HAVE THIS FEELING THAT I'M INTERACTING WITH SOMETHING THAT'S WAY GREATER THAN I AM. I'M IN THEIR WORLD.

— RUSSELL GIBBS



The Bee Vanishes

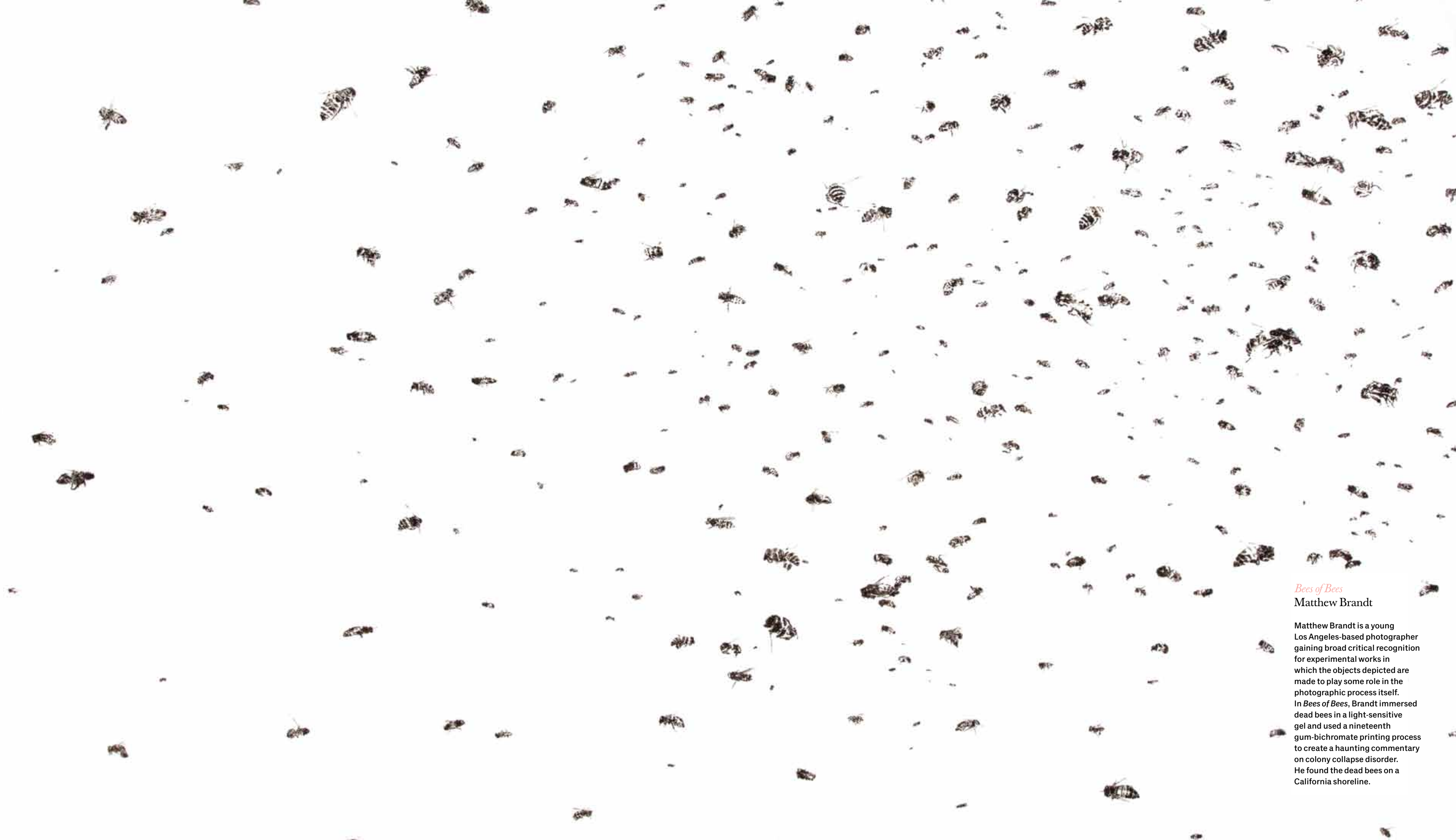
Bees get sick. It's always been the case. As Virgil observed 2,000 years ago, "It's true for bees as it is for human beings/ Life brings sickness with it." But bees have recently been sickening and otherwise dying at unprecedented rates. Colony collapse disorder (CCD) is the latest development in a worldwide trend toward declining populations of domestic and wild bees.

The disorder, which first came to light in 2005 when U.S. beekeepers lost 30% to 90% of their hives, has mysterious symptoms. There are no bodies, no trails of blood, no smoking guns. Forager bees head out in search of nectar and simply fail to return. Such workers as remain are immature bees showing an unnatural reluctance to feed even when the hive is full of honey. Even bees from healthy hives, which normally wouldn't think twice about robbing their neighbours, steer a wide berth around an afflicted colony. The weakened community soon collapses.

The causes of CDD remain elusive. Science suspects a number of stressors working in combination. Habitat degradation is leading to increasingly malnourished and weak bee populations. The introduction of a new class of pesticides (neonicotinoids), while not killing bees directly, may nevertheless be weakening them further. Parasites such as the varroa mite are increasingly infesting colonies and spreading illnesses such as deformed wing virus (DWV), which weakened bees are unable to resist. Controversy remains about which stressors are most important or whether some stressors (i.e., neonicotinoids) are stressors at all. But the combination theory is now widely accepted.

CDD is not the only cause of worldwide bee decline. Although some dispute the point, Canada has yet to see a case of CDD. Bee populations are nevertheless falling here too. Canadian apiarists are seeing winter colony losses of around 30%. The rate used to be about 15%. Interestingly, the increase has been attributed to the varroa mite and the other stressors linked to CDD.

Bee habitats aren't normally destroyed on their own. Pesticides don't manufacture themselves. Intensive, production-boosting beekeeping practices aren't decided on by bees. Humans are clearly implicated in the new stresses afflicting one of our longest-serving and most valuable animal partners. It's worth remembering this: 90% of our food derives from 100 crop species, more than 70 of which are pollinated by bees.



Bees of Bees Matthew Brandt

Matthew Brandt is a young Los Angeles-based photographer gaining broad critical recognition for experimental works in which the objects depicted are made to play some role in the photographic process itself. In *Bees of Bees*, Brandt immersed dead bees in a light-sensitive gel and used a nineteenth gum-bichromate printing process to create a haunting commentary on colony collapse disorder. He found the dead bees on a California shoreline.

A BRETON BEEKEEPER
TOLD ME THAT IF A BEE
COLONY FOUND ITSELF
WITH A FOOD SHORTAGE,
ALL THE FOOD WOULD
BE SHARED AMONGST
ALL THE MEMBERS UP UNTIL
THE END. A BEAUTIFUL
EXAMPLE OF SOLIDARITY.

- ERIC TOURNERET



HANG- ING IN THE GA- LLE- RY

*Photographing the Honey Hunters of the
Adamawa Plateau, Cameroon*

Before humans began keeping bees, they hunted for honey in the wild. Some of the world's remoter corners still see significant honey hunting. In the gallery forests of Cameroon's Adamawa Plateau, Paris-based photographer Eric Tourneret has documented the traditional honey hunting techniques of the region's small-plot farmers. An exceptionally high concentration of wild honeybee colonies is to be found in the narrow ribbons of trees that grow along the banks of rivers dissecting the savannah plateau.

Seeking to supplement their subsistence output with a cash-generating product, farmers harvest the honey from hives located in cavities high up in the tree cover. They gain access by building scaffolding and platforms using wood cut on the spot and tied together with fibres harvested from the leaves of the raffia tree, a type of palm. Since African honeybees are an exceptionally aggressive variety, the hunters protect themselves by donning an extraordinary suit of armour made from the bark of a tree whose sap repels bees. Rubbing in a paste composed of water and tree pulp protects areas of skin that remain exposed.

The gallery's trees are immense, with colonies often located 15 or more metres high. The men ascend in pairs, building the scaffold and platform as they go. They normally work in the dark of night when the bees are back in the hive. Harvesting is a "simple" matter of reaching into the cavity and breaking away the honeycombs, all the while withstanding the general attack of the enraged bees. The combs are placed in a raffia basket lined with banana leaves and lowered to the ground by rope.

Once the harvest is complete, the hunters usually leave behind hive cells filled with bee larvae for gba-sara birds to feed on. The gba-sara is an "informer bird" that at the sight of possible accomplices in honey hunting, emits a distinctive call to lead them to

a colony. This relationship of bird and human is likely to have developed over millennia of honey hunting.

Honeybees thrive in the richly supportive environment of the gallery forests and surrounding savannah. Farmers often help nature along by taking up a rudimentary form of beekeeping. They hang baskets in the trees for bees to colonize. So numerous are the bees and abundant the sources of nectar that for every 100 baskets hung at the beginning of the season, 95 will eventually be colonized and harvested.

Adamawa's combination of honey hunting and rudimentary beekeeping provides fascinating insight into what the process of domesticating bees must originally have been like. Not dogs or cats or cows or sheep but bees were the first wild creatures that humans ever domesticated. Thousands of years ago, beekeeping as we know it may have started when a group of honey hunters decided to hang baskets in the trees of a gallery forest.

For Tourneret, the attractions of photographing honey hunting in Adamawa are aesthetic and anthropological. Tourneret wants his photographs to "touch the emotions of people," to "surprise them with dreams of something different," and to say, "alright, look around you at how life is beautiful." At the same time, he wants his photographs to document a very old relationship between humans and other living creatures. Although Adamawa has benefitted from an influx of young people who have fled economic dislocation in the cities to take up farming in the countryside, the ways of traditional honey hunting may not survive forever. Tourneret is determined to bear witness to a remarkable human activity.



NAPOLEON

When republicanism no longer suited and Napoleon decided to become emperor, he made the bee his emblem. In part, his choice was an accident of history.

The bee was considered an emblem of French monarchy older than the fleur-de-lys. How better to one-up the Bourbons than by choosing a symbol that predated their own?

But there was more to it than that. The bee, he explained, “has something national about it.” Embroidering his imperial robes with a multitude of golden bees was meant to make a point. The nation, he was claiming, swarmed around him like loyal bees, intent on building an empire and ready to die in their monarch’s defence.

As a decorative motif, bees became ubiquitous during Napoleon’s reign. When the Bourbons returned to power, they had them altered or scraped away.

Napoléon I^{er} en costume du Sacre (1805)
FRANÇOIS GÉRARD (1770-1837)





Sticky



The Curative Bee

by James Chatto



The

rustic acre on a Greek island mountainside where I sometimes live is full of bees. They belong to our neighbours but they forage in our garden, zooming among the flower beds in the heat of murmurous afternoons. The neighbours pay us an annual tribute of a jar of their honey – a rich dark meli with a complex floral, herbal, even malty character.

Our son Joseph was born on the island and spent his formative years in this garden. Durrell-like, he was fascinated by the insect life – he once considered becoming a myrmecologist – but in the end archaeology and then medieval history claimed him. Baltic rather than Balkan studies are the subject of his doctorate, including a research interest in the medieval Lithuanian beeswax and honey trade. Apparently it was the European hub in those times, thanks to the busy-as-bees Hanseatic merchants. What goes around comes around. I remember hurrying him indoors one day when the neighbours' bees were swarming – the air thick with them, thousands of frenetic bees intent on some private business, the buzzing extraordinarily loud – to me, it was like a moment from a horror film, but it made a more favourable impression on Joe. An hour or so later, order was restored and we ventured back into the bright morning.

Honey is magical. Always has been. In Greece and in the Baltic. In the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*, Lemminkäinen's mother manages to bring her heroic but dismembered son back to life with honey's help. She summons a bee and sends the little guy away to gather it. You remember the moment:

*"Tiny bee, thou honey-birdling,
Lord of all the forest flowers,
Fly away and gather honey,
Bring to me the forest-sweetness,
Found in Metsola's rich gardens,
And in Tapio's fragrant meadows,
From the petals of the flowers,
From the blooming herbs and grasses,
Thus to heal my hero's anguish,
Thus to heal his wounds of evil."*

The bee does his best but regular honey isn't effective. So he flies off to fetch the magic honey from the Isles of the Blessed. Even that isn't enough. It's only when he flies all the way to the Seventh and highest Heaven of God (Ukko/Jumala) himself and brings back the ultimate honey that gives life to every living thing that Lemminkäinen is revived. Such a noble bee.

*Now the mother well anointing,
Heals her son, the magic singer,
Eyes, and ears, and tongue, and temples,
Breaks, and cuts, and seams, anointing,
Touching well the life-blood centres,
Speaks these words of magic import
To the sleeping Lemminkäinen:
"Wake, arise from out thy slumber,
From the worst of low conditions,
From thy state of dire misfortune!"*

You'll notice she speaks in mellifluous trochaic tetrameter, every Finnish rune-singer's preferred metre. Honey-tongued Henry W. Longfellow borrowed it for the Song of Hiawatha after spending a summer in Sweden in 1835 and picking up a bit of Finnish. So Joe tells me.

The point is, honey is good for you. Around here, in ancient times, the priestesses of Artemis and Demeter were referred to as melissae – bees – while the original Melissa was a gracious nymph, one of Zeus's nannies, who taught the first humans how to turn honey into mead. Another reason to be grateful for the honey-birdling bee.





Queen Aganetha Dyck

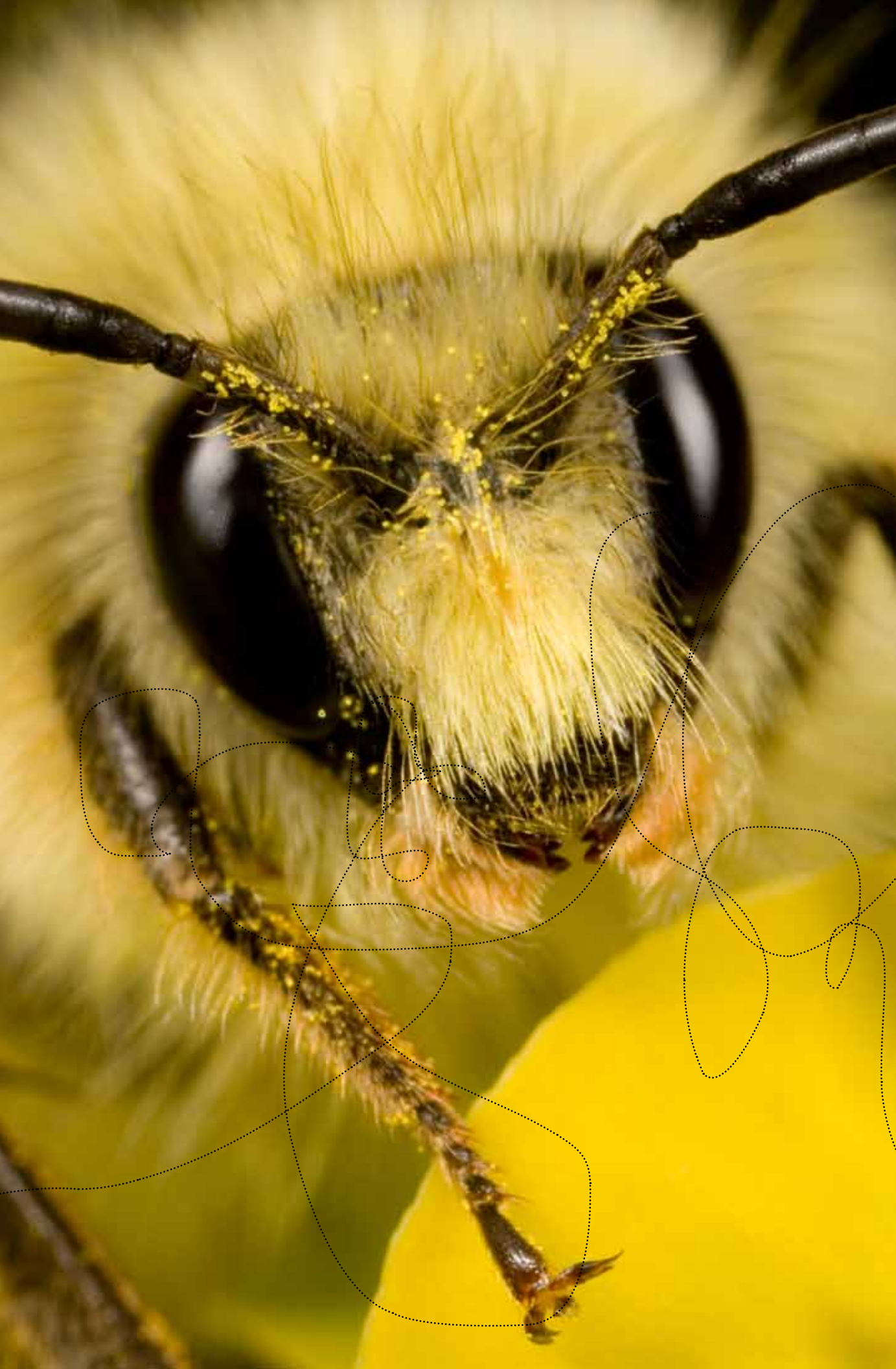
Canadian artist Aganetha Dyck collaborates on many of her works and even outsources their production. But her fellow creators aren't traditional artists, or even human. For 20 years, Dyck has been creating art in tandem with honeybees.

Aganetha Dyck garnered awards and international attention with her recent series of inter-species sculptures, which pair a found object and the bees' handiwork. Dyck selects some product of human manufacture, either functional or decorative, and places it inside a beehive. The bees then begin to transform this object into something recognizable but utterly new—an artwork that neither humans nor bees could create on their own.

The piece that best seems to capture this collaborative process is a honeycomb-adorned statuette of Queen Elizabeth II. The sovereign lady of England is the hive's new queen bee and as the insects flock around her, they make her all the more regal. For the queen, the honeycomb forms a stately throne and futuristic crown—or perhaps an outlandish fascinator worn to a royal wedding. We might even take the odd protuberances for the lacy ruff of Good Queen Bess or the wedding veil of Queen Victoria.

Unified by wax and soft pastel colours, the end result is co-operative. Whatever visions the sculpture conjures, the combination is pure symbiosis.





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And then, when early evening comes around
And Vesper tells them it's time for them to leave
Their foraging in the fields, back home they come,
And you can hear their murmuring humming as
They groom themselves and hither and thither flit
Around the doors and thresholds of their houses;
After that, when they compose themselves
To rest within their chambers, and sound sleep
Possesses their bodies weary from their labors,
All through the night the bees are utterly silent.

Translated by David Ferry

Virgil published The Georgics in 29 BCE shortly after the end of a ruinous civil war in Rome that had lasted 15 years. His poem's treatment of the bees has often been regarded as a commentary on that period of turmoil.

W/A

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Print Production Specifications:

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Concept & Design

Hamby & Woolley Inc.

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K-abeilles Hotel for Bees, AtelierD (Jeanroy, Leduc, Riber architectes associés) www.atelierd.org; photo, Stephane Spach www.spach-photographe.com

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Text Credits

The Georgics of Virgil. Translated by David Ferry.
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005

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"Queen, Aganetha Dyck," Emma Hamby

All additional text was written by Michael Erkelenz

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Russell Gibbs (www.gibbshoney.com) and Eric Tourneret for agreeing to be interviewed.

Wayward Arts Staff

Rich Pauptit, Biological Father
David Gallant, Guidance Councillor
Derek Emerson, Truant Officer

Publication Mail Agreement #42456024, ISSN 2291-1944

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