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Artist Paul Paiement gets bugs out of modern technology

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Because artist Paul Paiement creates illustrations of bugs, you might think he is interested in entomology. No, he is just intrigued by the contrast of the slow evolution of insects with the rapid-fire changes in technology. Paiement is fascinated by the disparity – that it takes bugs a millennium to evolve, while technology is already dated once out the door.

His new series, based on ideas of transformation, perception and reality, is exhibited at the Peter Blake Gallery. Paiement's art is not only unique, it is profound and beautifully rendered. His hybrid creatures are composed of parts of modern and commonplace technology, such as cell phones, speakers and iPods, but at first look, you would swear they are detailed portraits of real bugs.

It all began when Paiement considered using made-up insects composed of commonplace consumer products – sneakers, a shaver, lenses from sunglasses, or a Volkswagen Beetle. The exhibition then – in 2005 at the Laguna Art Museum – and now are about the ways we judge and investigate facts. The metaphor of a fictitious insect made to look buglike may never fool a real entomologist, but in Paiement's case, he makes these delightful



Paul Paiement's "Hyalophora Xbox controlerae" is a butterfly with the body of an Xbox controller.

creatures even more wonderful than if we were to see an ad for just an iPod or a cell phone or any of the gadgets he includes in his work.

Paiement uses traditional egg tempera and a watercolor technique. But it is his imagination and ability to relate insect body parts with technology or with any other form that is his talent. Once we realize that Paiement has fooled us with humor, gleefully we continue the search among wings, antennae or other insect anatomy for hidden but familiar technology.

In the '90s, studying at USC, Paiement became interested in Rorschach blots and the idea of interpreting imagery. Based on the human tendency to find the recognizable in the unrecognizable, people begin to see in

Rorschach blots familiar images where there may not be any.

Paiement bases his ideas on the fact that people see shapes first, even before they see color. The essence of his art is shapes. He is drawn to shapes and finds a trip to Target or browsing through a gadget catalog a rich source for connecting existing shapes with contours of fantasy bug or other shapes he may be creating.

Artists have for hundreds of years used *trompe l'oeil*, French for a fool-the-eye technique. Art being a visual experience, some artists may include fooling the viewer just for the fun of it.

The questionable story goes that American Revolutionary artist Charles Wilson Peale painted his two young sons, one going up a narrow staircase, the

other looking down. The staircase was so realistic that Gen. George Washington tipped his hat as he went by, acknowledging the presence of the boys.

Although different from Paiement's art, both artists tried to convey a realism that, on first glance, could fool viewers.

Another fun aspect of Paiement's art is that he makes up the names of his hybrid creatures, such as "Xylorhiza Wiius," combining the genesis of real insect species with the video-game controller from which they are composed.

Paiement continually challenges himself both in graphic design and materials. He says his art is a form of engineering in which he improves how he works and what he works on. Specifically, Paiement creates a conceptual challenge and then must find ways to meet it. Figuring out the solution and the new ideas the solution requires is among the most stimulating aspects of his art making.

Viewers see this energy in Paiement's work, not only because of his talent for masquerading technology as entomology but also because of his continual growth in aesthetic sensitivity: composition, colors and visual rendering.

Peter Blake Gallery is at 326 N. Coast Highways. For more information, call 949-376-9994 or visit Paiement's Web site.