

JANE HAMMOND: *FOUR WAYS TO BLUE* (2006)

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This text is an edited version of the audio commentary recorded by Alfredo Franco as part of the Zimmerli Art Museum's audio guide for the exhibition *Art=Text=Art: Works by Contemporary Artists* (September 4, 2012 – January 6, 2013). No passage of this text may be reprinted or quoted without permission from the author. To obtain permission, please contact Marilyn Symmes at the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey: msymmes@zimmerli.rutgers.edu.

Jane Hammond created *Four Ways to Blue* (2006), a lovely image of a blue butterfly resting on a page of text, for Wynn Kramarsky's eightieth birthday. The artist wanted to make a piece that referenced the act of collecting as a tribute to Kramarsky's passion for collecting art. But she did not want to make a piece that would be directly about Kramarsky or that, in her words, would "have a flattering nature." Instead Hammond's piece references another legendary collector, Vladimir Nabokov.

You may know Nabokov as a writer, particularly as the author of the controversial novel *Lolita*, one of the most powerful works of twentieth-century literature. But Nabokov was also a very serious lepidopterist, a person who studies moths and butterflies. Nabokov's butterfly collection consisted of thousands of captures. In fact his interest in lepidoptery rivaled his interest in writing.

Nabokov was born in 1899 in pre-Revolutionary Russia. His wealthy lawyer father encouraged his early interest in collecting butterflies. After the Revolution of 1917, when Nabokov lived in exile in Germany and France, he would take time off from writing to go on trips throughout Europe in search of rare and unknown butterflies. When he settled in the United States in the 1940s, he worked as a research fellow at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, spending long hours cataloguing the museum's collections as well as studying Polyommata, a specific subfamily of gossamer-winged butterflies also known as the Blues—a misleading name, as members of this butterfly group

can be brown, white, or gray. Between 1949 and 1959, Nabokov and his wife, Vera, drove over 150,000 miles through North America on butterfly hunts. These trips also helped him to collect details about American life that found their way into his novels. A genus of butterflies, the *Nabokovia*, was named in his honor by the entomologist Francis Hemming in 1960.

In Hammond's *Four Ways to Blue*, text taken from an interview with Nabokov is laser cut out of a piece of white paper and placed over printed Japanese paper. This makes the text just a bit hard to read, but we can make out that it consists of Nabokov's description of the four key pleasures of collecting butterflies. Superimposed on this laser-cut sheet is a full-color cutout scan of an actual *Papilio ulysses*, an exquisite swallowtail butterfly. The three-dimensional butterfly element further obscures the words of Nabokov the collector by casting its shadow over them. The azurite color and crispness of the image make the butterfly seem so real, so alive—as if it were not yet captured, pinned, or, indeed, collected.

Notice the eyes at the top corners of the butterfly's left and right wings: these are the pupils of Wynn Kramarsky's wife, Sally, photo-montaged into the image by Hammond. Collectors of butterflies and artworks alike must have quick, alert eyes to capture the object of their interest. Yet in Hammond's piece this seems reversed: the butterfly affixes *us* with its gaze, captivating us so that we can almost feel the net coming down over our heads. We've been acquired—for some grand collection of the butterfly's own.

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