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## THE BOX

July 1–31, 2013

### Dana Levy

*The Wake* (2011)

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Courtesy of Braverman Gallery, Tel Aviv

*Categorizing is a form of control. Everything in life is constantly changing, and therefore may seem chaotic, but we seem to have a desire to make things stay permanent. I wonder if man's desire to control and to organize is a kind of battle against our morality. It's interesting because on a grander scale, I think there is an order to the chaos.*—Dana Levy\*

Darkness yields to light, death yields to life; Israeli-born artist Dana Levy's *The Wake* is a meditation on duality. Shot in the Department of Entomology at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, Levy released 100 monarch butterflies into the darkened corridors of the museum's collections. Carefully mounted, preserved, and categorized specimens create a haunting stillness that is disrupted by an almost dreamlike awakening of butterflies on cases, drawers, and cabinets. Soon the entire collection seems to slowly return to life with movement and flight.

The process to create *The Wake* began when Levy visited the La Specola Natural History Museum (Museo di Storia Naturale di Firenze) in Florence, Italy. "It was one of the most amazing places I have ever visited," Levy recalls. "Not much has changed there since it was founded 220 years ago. It was almost empty and I spent a whole day there. I photographed these haunting rooms of taxidermy animals and other specimens, it just felt like I traveled back in time. I kept fantasizing about bringing live animals into this place. I had an urge to transport it into the present moment, **to form a dialogue between past and present.**" In 2008, Levy

exhibited her photographs from this exploration in *Habitat*, a solo show at Tavi Dresdner Gallery, Tel Aviv. "Nothing was alive in any of the photographs in the show; there were only traces of life. My desire to bring life into these places grew stronger."

This desire became a reality during a residency at the Triangle Arts Association in New York (2009–2010). Levy reached out to Dr. John Rawlins, head of the Department of Entomology at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and after a few email exchanges, he agreed to host the project and assist her with its execution. Thanks to his generosity and willingness, the work was conceived. "I find if I'm clear and passionate about what I want to do, things usually fall into place, and no project is too big. **People seem to want to help if they realize your intention is to create poetry.**"

Like a Renaissance-era cabinet of curiosities brought to life, *The Wake* explores subjects Levy tackles poetically in all of her work: order and chaos, life and death, memory, nostalgia, archives, history, man's relationship with nature, home as a temporary place, the desire for freedom. The stillness of the museum's corridors bears silent witness to the passage of time: "A new life enters where one has left." The ephemeral lives of these fragile insects come to represent our own inherent fragility, our desire to control and to be free, to find order and beauty in the chaos. As an artist who is intimately connected to her dreams, Levy creates a tactile dreamscape for all of us in *The Wake*, one that haunts us long after the corridors return to darkness.

Levy received an MA in electronic imaging from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee, Scotland. Her work has been featured in numerous group and solo exhibitions around the world, from Austria to New York to Tel Aviv. She has received a variety of awards and residencies, including the 2013 Beatrice Kolliner Young Artist Award (from the Israel Museum, Jerusalem). She is currently working on a series of video installations inspired by Hurricane Sandy. The artist lives and works in New York City.

Cheryl-Lynn May  
Curatorial Assistant, Exhibitions Program

\*All quotations come from email exchanges between the artist and the author.

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Dana Levy  
*The Wake* (2011)  
5 mins., HD video  
Courtesy of Braverman Gallery, Tel Aviv

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