



PennState



Be the Bee

What made these women strap on bee bonnets and venture into the world of another species? An undergraduate research project examines the sting of undervalued gender-related labor.

By Tammy Hosterman

What do domestic work and the traditional gender roles of women have in common with the non-visible labor of honeybees?

In a multimedia project in which women performed the work of honeybees, undergraduate Christina Dietz found that, in both subjects, the value of labor is lessened based on its lack of visibility.

"I hope to bring attention to the occurrence of a shift in perceived importance when the member that performs a specific labor changes," said Dietz.



Bee House Video

Still Shot from "Honeybees and Homemakers: Pollination and Gendered Labor. Field shots taken at Tait Farm.

IMAGE: HELEN MASER

"The roles and processes of bees become more visible when humans perform in their place."—Christina Dietz

As part of her project, "Honeybees and Homemakers: Pollination and Gendered Labor," Dietz built a small, house-like structure. She installed two observation hives in the windows of the house, allowing viewers to glimpse what goes on inside a beehive. She also created a video that follows three young women in their imagined work day as they perform the task of pollination. The women blur the lines between work and leisure, as they must uphold a lovely appearance while toiling in the fields, spreading pollen from one flower to another. At the end of the day, they brush pollen from their skirts, collect their soiled gloves, and retire for the day, to prepare to work again the next day.

Dietz, who is double-majoring in visual arts and psychology, is making the most of the research opportunities afforded her at Penn State. "As a research school, we have access to so many professionals that are incredibly passionate and willing to share about their field of specialty," she said. "I was able to use both the visual and person-to-person communication skills I've learned from my studio professors and translate some of the knowledge I've been given through the Department of Entomology."



Bee House at The Great Insect Fair

Families admire Christina Dietz's Bee House at the recent Great Insect Fair.

IMAGE: HELEN MASER

"Sculpture and entomology; insects and feminism; pollination and gendered labor—the most exciting things happen when two seemingly disparate subjects are tied together."—Christina Dietz

Working on the large-scale project, Dietz learned how to write a proposal; break down a detailed project budget; direct a team of people, including actors, a videographer, and a photographer; communicate across colleges; and coordinate many variables. She's learned how to build a small structure, from floorboards to shingled roof, while keeping in mind the specific conditions that a bee colony needs to thrive.

"Managing such a complex project has been a practice run for life as an artist after graduation," she said. "It is invaluable to be able to work through a daunting project with the safety net of supportive professors and instructors around me."

"Christina has always been a hard worker, yet I feel this project propelled a new approach to focus and risk in her creative workflow," said Bonnie Collura, faculty mentor to Dietz throughout her project.

"To translate her idea in both 3D and 4D space, Christina needed to take on the responsibilities of fabricator, film director, prop builder, scenic designer, and budget manager," Collura said. "To get her project done on time and to a standard that she held herself accountable to, Christina simultaneously embodied creative discovery and deft direction. This is an extraordinarily difficult thing to do; it was inspiring to watch her take on so much with such aplomb."

Dietz's installation was recently displayed at the Great Insect Fair at the Ag Arena. It is currently installed for public view in front of the Arts Cottage (near Yellow E parking lot) through October 20.

Her project was funded by an Apes Valentes Undergraduate Research Award provided through the Center for Pollinator Research. Successful candidates receive an award of up to \$4,500 to be applied to wages and other costs related to their research, which can involve the development of educational or

art projects related to pollinators.

Collaborators on the project included Michelle Nash, video cinematography and editing; Julianna Dietz, graphic design; and Helen Maser, set photography.
