

Bee Cell

A Video Environment by Jonathan PJ Smith and Ethan Turpin

What is the experience of a bee in the hive? Over millennia people have learned about the sophisticated nature of bees and their colonies. At once alien and familiar, the “society” of bees, with its intricate systems of communication, architecture, and workforce, can’t help but feel analogous to humanity. With bee colonies collapsing unexpectedly, new revelations about our responsibility and reliance come to light with implications for human civilization. The Bee Cell invites museum audiences to confront their perception of bees by immersing themselves in a proxy hive where scale and perspective are altered for a heightened experience.

Bee Cell is a hexagonal chamber comprised of six frosted glass panels filled with video projection. From outside viewers see macro imagery of bees and honeycomb structures, elegantly framed by Victorian-style molding. Upon entering the chamber through one of its two doors, people find themselves in a bold hive-like habitat of surrounding video and audio. A mirrored ceiling creates an illusion of extended interior space and incorporates the viewer’s own image with that of the surrounding bee colony. Video:

<http://vimeo.com/brighteyecinema/bee-cell>

History:

Bee Cell was commissioned by Ganna Walska Lotusland in Montecito, California as a centerpiece for the *Swarm: A Collaboration with Bees* exhibit. Jonathan PJ Smith and Ethan Turpin made video recordings of a five foot tall, eleven year old wild beehive. The artists worked with master carpenter Van Granaroli to build an elegant, easy-to-assemble chamber for the 365 degree display of this video content. The installation opened with *Swarm* on February 22nd, 2013 to public and critical acclaim, fostering discussion about the human relationship to bees during its 11 week run.

Bee Cell is currently exhibiting at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.



Bee Cell, exterior view, Lotusland, California 2013.



Bee Cell, interior views, Lotusland, California 2013.

Press:

<http://www.independent.com/news/2013/mar/28/swarm-collaboration-bees-lotusland/>

Swarm: A Collaboration with Bees at Lotusland

Thursday, March 28, 2013 by CHARLES DONELAN



“...As I stood inside and alongside the “Bee Cell” with many different people over the course of two visits to *Swarm*, I came to the conclusion that not only was this the coolest installation I had experienced in a long time, but it was also the coolest location for an installation. It’s one thing to have a great immersive contemporary art experience in a museum, or at an art fair, and quite another to emerge, after several minutes of humming, buzzing, wiggling communion with one’s inner bee, into the boudoir of Madame Ganna Walska.

- Charles Donelan

Bee Cell - Specifications:

Overall Structure

The Bee Cell is comprised of six, 8' x 3' "privacy doors", four of which are fixed and act as panels and two that operate as functioning doors. Each of the six privacy doors contains a pane of tempered, acid-washed glass that functions as a two way projector screen. Panels of moulding complete the structure above and support a mylar mirror ceiling.

Measurements

Overall height: 107"

Exterior width at widest point: 82"

Interior width at widest point excluding threshold: 73.5"

Footprint: 29.5 square feet

Circular footprint using distance from center of Bee Cell to rear projectors as the radius: 365 square feet

Audio Video Equipment

3 x Short throw projectors

3 x projector mounts

4 x Micca Speck 1080p media players using HMDI, three for video, one for sound

4 x flash drives, three for video, one for sound

1 x pair of small, powered speakers

Projector Placement

The projectors are mounted from the ceiling at a distance of approximately 62" from the Bee Cell. Each projector casts imagery on two adjacent glass panels.

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