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WITH THE KIDS

Wait, don't squish it; it may be art

By Brenda Rees
Special to The Times

For artists, everything has potential to be a canvas. Freeway walls can become murals, sidewalks make great chalk easels and even cars have been known to get artified with clever use of paint and blingy ornamentation.

But bugs? Big creepy-crawly bugs?

Why not, say local insect-loving artists Chris Brand and Evan Skrederstu, who for three years have been transforming the backs of dead roaches, spiders and mantises into miniature decorative masterpieces. Think of them as the Picasso and Cézanne of the bug painting world - a rather small kingdom, to be sure.

Brand and Skrederstu will be showing off their painted bug creations at this year's Bug Fair taking place Saturday and Sunday at the Natural History Museum.

Included will be a walking leaf adorned with delicate chrysanthemums, a weevil exotically trimmed with the Taj Mahal and a portrait of a somewhat stunned Alfred Hitchcock painted on the back of a large beetle.

"So many people think we use a magnifier when we paint, but we don't," says Skrederstu, a scenic painter who got the idea for bug painting when he and Brand - a tattoo artist - were painting a mural near downtown and accidentally sprayed a little bug blue.

"We said, 'Hey, we've painted just about everything we could, why not bugs?' " explains Skrederstu, who with Brand has always collected and enjoyed insects.

"I love the mechanics of bugs - they are structurally and biologically beautiful," says Brand, whose latest work is a portrait of Rodney Dangerfield on a large Australian roach. "Bugs, like Rodney, need all the respect they can get."

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The Bug Fair, National History Museum, 900 Exposition Blvd., L.A. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. \$9 adults, \$6.50 ages 13 to 17, \$2 children 5 to 12. (213) 763-DINO.